



THE UNIVERSITY *of* EDINBURGH

This thesis has been submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for a postgraduate degree (e.g. PhD, MPhil, DClinPsychol) at the University of Edinburgh. Please note the following terms and conditions of use:

- This work is protected by copyright and other intellectual property rights, which are retained by the thesis author, unless otherwise stated.
- A copy can be downloaded for personal non-commercial research or study, without prior permission or charge.
- This thesis cannot be reproduced or quoted extensively from without first obtaining permission in writing from the author.
- The content must not be changed in any way or sold commercially in any format or medium without the formal permission of the author.
- When referring to this work, full bibliographic details including the author, title, awarding institution and date of the thesis must be given.

Myth, Allusion, Gender, in the Early Poetry of T. S. Eliot

Simon Matthew James Cattle

PhD

University of Edinburgh

2000



Abstract

T. S. Eliot's use of allusion is crucial to the structure and themes of his early poetry. It may be viewed as a compulsion, evident in even the earliest poems, rather than just affectation or elitism. His allusions often involve the reversal or re-ordering of constructions of gender in other literature, especially in other literary treatments of myth. Eliot's "classical" anti-Romanticism may be understood according to this dual concern with myth and gender, in that his poetry simultaneously derives from and attacks a perceived "feminised" Romantic tradition, one which focuses on female characters and which fetishises, particularly, a sympathetic portrayal of *femmes fatales* of classical myth, such as Circe, Lamia and Venus. Eliot is thus subverting, or "correcting", what are themselves often subversive genderings of myth. Another aspect of myth, that of the quest, is set in opposition to the predatory female by Eliot. A number of early poems place *flâneur* figures in the role of questers in a context of constraining feminine influence. These questers attempt, via mysticism, to escape from or blur gender and sexuality, or may be ensnared by such things in fertility rituals. A sado-masochistic motivation towards martyrdom is present in poems between 1911 and 1920. With its dual characteristics of disguise and exposure, Eliotic allusion to ritual and myth is itself a ritual (of literary re-enactment) based on a myth (of literature), namely Eliot's "Tradition". Allusive reconfiguration being a two-way process, Eliot's poetry is often implicitly subverted or "corrected" by its own allusions. Thus we are offered more complex representations of gender than may first appear; female characters may be viewed as sympathetic as well as predatory, male ones as being constructed often from representations of femininity rather than masculinity. The poems themselves demonstrate intense awareness of this fluctuation of gender, which appears in earlier poems as a threat, but in *The Waste Land* as the potential for a rapprochement between genders. This poem comprises multiple layers of re-enactments and reconfigurations of gender-in-myth, centring upon Shakespeare's *Venus and Adonis*. *The Waste Land*'s treatment of myth should not be seen as merely reflecting a passing interest in anthropology, but as the culmination of concerns with myth and gender dating back to the earliest poetry. The complex interrelation of the two aspects leaves it unclear whether Eliot's allusive compulsion derives principally from a concern with mythologies of literature or from a concern with mythologies of gender.

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank my supervisor, Professor Aidan Day, for his kind and extensive advice and practical assistance. These have been of great value, and are much appreciated. I have also been fortunate enough to benefit from the insight, expertise and encouragement of the following people, to whom I am most grateful: Professor Ian Campbell, Professor Cairns Craig, Ronnie Graham, Dr Kevin MacGinlay, Brendan MacGurk, Teresa Murray, Dr Stephen Priest, Tanja Rahneberg, Monika Smialkowska, Dr Lee Spinks and Imogen Walker. Finally, I would like to thank my family, especially my parents and my sister Rachel, for their extremely generous support and encouragement, without which this work would not have been possible.

Abbreviations

The following abbreviations have been employed with regard to works repeatedly referred to. In each case, the full bibliographical information is given in a footnote at the first instance of reference.

Wilkie Collins: *WIW - The Woman in White*

T. S. Eliot:

- ECP - Collected Poems: 1909-1962*
- FLA - For Lancelot Andrewes: Essays in Style and Order*
- IOTMH - Inventions of the March Hare: Poems 1909-1917*
- PWIEY - Poems Written in Early Youth*
- SE - Selected Essays*
- SP - Selected Prose*
- TCTC - To Criticise the Critic*
- TSW - The Sacred Wood*
- TWL - The Waste Land*
- TWLfacs - The Waste Land: A Facsimile and Transcript of the Original Draft*
- UOP - The Use of Poetry and the Use of Criticism*

Oscar Wilde: *PODG - The Picture of Dorian Gray*

Contents

Abstract

Acknowledgements

Declaration

Abbreviations

Introduction	1
Chapter One - Authenticity and Allusion	6
Chapter Two - Marionette and Quester: Public and Private Ritual	33
Chapter Three - Midnight shakes the memory: The Symbolism of “Rhapsody on a Windy Night”	59
Chapter Four - “One inevitable cross”: Martyrdom	90
Chapter Five - “That Old Classical Drag”: <i>The Waste Land</i>	133
Conclusion	221
Bibliography	223

Myth, Allusion, Gender, in the Early Poetry of T. S. Eliot.

Introduction

I

In November 1923, *Dial* magazine carried a review of James Joyce's novel *Ulysses* entitled "*Ulysses, Order, and Myth*". The reviewer was T. S. Eliot. Eliot praised Joyce's employment of Homer's *Odyssey* as a kind of symbolic narrative framework for his novel, which is a simultaneously panoramic and microscopic depiction of one day in Dublin in 1904. The startling variety and compendious nature of *Ulysses* is better experienced by the reader than described by the critic here, but in short, and put simply, it is long and difficult.

In what was to become a famous statement, Eliot assessed *Ulysses* as marking a potential shift of titanic proportions in approaches to writing: "Instead of narrative method, we may now use the mythical method. It is, I seriously believe, a step toward making the modern world possible for art"¹. The line about making the world possible for art (rather than art possible for the world) is typically provocative. What does seem clear is that Eliot was not just describing Joyce and his novel in the article; the appreciative reviewer is not so much casting light on *Ulysses* as signalling back at it with his own mirror.

"*Ulysses, Order and Myth*" has commonly been viewed, in retrospect, as much as an implicit justification for Eliot's own poetic masterpiece of the previous year, *The Waste Land*, as an explicit one for Joyce's; the great modernist novel and the great modernist poem are imagined side by side, with the family resemblance plain to see. Indeed, it is on the grounds that this is what Eliot principally intended by the article that Karl Shapiro came later to reject the notion of a *Waste Land* to which myth was integral: for, he claimed, Eliot had misunderstood *Ulysses* in viewing it as a parallel with Homer - the "mythical" form was "worthless and not even true", equally inapplicable to both works². The validity of this remark is partly a question for scholars of Joyce; the reasoning is certainly strange. Nevertheless, leaving

¹ *Dial*, 75: 5 (November 1923), 480-83 (p.483).

² *The Death of Literary Judgement* (excerpt), in *T. S. Eliot: The Waste Land; A Case Book*, ed. C. B. Cox and Arnold P. Hinchliffe (London: Macmillan, 1986), pp.62-63 (p.62).

Ulysses aside, Shapiro's anti-mythical stance towards interpretation of *The Waste Land* is one that has been shared by a number of other, quite vociferous, critics, so that, as I shall discuss later in this work, there now exists a critical consensus towards the poem in this respect that is, if no longer hostile, then at least sceptical or indifferent.

It is because *The Waste Land* is viewed as central to Eliot's poetic achievement, so revolutionary and inimitable is its form, that the question of its own mythical quotient, real or imagined, has a powerful and unavoidable bearing on any consideration of myth's role and significance elsewhere in his work. Subsequent to *The Waste Land*'s publication, the role of the myth in that text was addressed almost wholly with regard to references to the anthropological works of Sir James Frazer and Jessie Weston that were to be found in the Notes Eliot appended to the piece. While these references aroused interest and enthusiasm with some critics, there increasingly set in a reaction against the propriety and validity of such pointers. The history of this controversy is something I examine later in this study, but the important point is that the role of myth in the poem was then, and still is, seen to stand or fall in relation to these outside references. Even those who have viewed Frazer and Weston as successfully integrated elements of the poem's significance have tended to understand this treatment of myth as unique in Eliot's poetry - a notable exception being Robert Crawford, who makes a strong argument in finding widespread anthropological influences throughout Eliot's work³. Those who have seen *The Waste Land* as a conspicuous failure to deal with the mythical theme have, of course, been even less inclined to look for evidence of it *elsewhere* in the oeuvre. It is the central supposition of this thesis that, rather than "the mythical method" being something to be considered simply with regard to *The Waste Land*, this method is in fact a founding principle upon which his poetic revolution was built; Eliot was not merely justifying *The Waste Land* in the *Dial*, he was justifying almost his entire literary output to that point. *The Waste Land* is really no more "mythical" in its themes and forms than the rest of Eliot's early poetry - which is to say that it is, in fact, *highly* mythical.

³ *The Savage and the City in the Work of T. S. Eliot* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987).

II

There are two main senses in which one might understand the term “mythical” today, and which are both relevant to a discussion of Eliot’s work, namely the *anthropological* and the *psychoanalytical*. Writers such as Weston and Frazer clearly come into the picture with regard to the anthropological, and the likes of Jung and Freud into the psychoanalytical. They may even be seen by some as overlapping or even identical. My study makes reference to both of these strands of the “mythical”, but it is a third strand, namely *literary* myth, which constitutes my main focus of interest. By “literary myth” I mean principally representations and re-workings of myth in individual works, and the intertextual relationship of such re-workings in a literary tradition. In a subordinate but closely related sense, I refer also to a kind of myth-of-literature: the way in which writers and texts make use of mythic frameworks and symbolism not just for subject matter but also as a way of envisioning the role of the poem and poet themselves in relation to other poems and poets within history and culture.

Consequently, this study is very largely concerned with T. S. Eliot’s practice of literary allusion - the echoing and alteration of previous works of literature. I have attempted to identify a number of new sources in this respect. The study of allusion runs the risk of descending into pedantry or simple self-delusion, in that the reality and significance of perceived literary echoes is a problem of some magnitude linguistically and philosophically. Nevertheless, the allusive method is one of Eliot’s self-professed techniques, and consideration of it is, to my mind, central to an understanding of his poetry and his role as a poet. The sources I refer to have suggested to me that the habitual use of specifically mythical allusions is a marked characteristic of Eliot’s poetry, in terms both of character and action. Further, with regard to the actual significance of these mythical allusions, it has seemed to me that again and again Eliot’s choice of references and the nature of his alterations point to a preoccupation with gender. Again, such a preoccupation may be seen as pointing back to the question of this male poet’s relation to his social and literary context.

Since all these aspects of myth, literature and gender may be seen to overlap, intersect, and sometimes form unbroken circles, in order to make my argument

comparatively simple, and not too long, I have chosen a more or less chronological rather than purely thematic pattern of discussion, and my survey extends only up to and including *The Waste Land*. It does, though, include some examination of earlier poems from the recently published *Inventions of the March Hare: Poems 1909-1917*. There are to be found in these poems clear indications of an already highly developed, indeed one might say compulsive, allusive technique, as well as an often surprisingly explicit concern with myth and gender. As John T. Mayer has observed, had Eliot persisted with and published as planned a number of these early poems “we would have a very different view of the early Eliot than the conventional one based on what Eliot published, poems such as “Prufrock”, “Portrait of a Lady”, and Boston satires like “Cousin Nancy””⁴. The view would, I believe, rightly have shown far more than has been the case the importance of myth and gender throughout the early poetry.

This study is in five chapters. In the first chapter I try to give indications of how Eliot’s allusive technique functions, and consider its relation to ideas of influence and gender. In the second chapter I examine early works from *Inventions of the March Hare* and some from *Prufrock and Other Observations*, with particular regard to the employment of marionette and *flâneur* figures as mythic questers torn between social and mystic ends. Chapter Three is given over to a detailed discussion of “Rhapsody on A Windy Night”, an important and neglected poem, it seems to me, where gender anxiety and myth meet in a dream re-enactment of fertility rituals. Chapter Four considers a related character to the mythic quester, namely the martyr, from the poems written at the time of “Rhapsody”, through “The Death of Saint Narcissus”, and up to “Burbank with a Baedeker: Bleistein with a Cigar”, a poem which may be understood in theme and technique as a miniature model for *The Waste Land*, which is itself the subject of the fifth chapter, and in which gender reversal is central to the re-enactment of other literary texts and their own representations of myth.

In this study, I describe Eliot’s allusive technique as “compulsive”, and relate it particularly to its treatment of, and entanglement with, gender. This obviously suggests the possibility of a biographical reading, to which I imagine the ideas in this

⁴ “*The Waste Land* and Eliot’s Poetry Notebook”, in *T. S. Eliot: The Modernist in History*, ed. Ronald Bush (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), pp.67-90 (p.90).

study might be amenable; however, my concern is not with the personal sources of this compulsion but with the end product, and how it attempts to render itself “authentic” and central to the tradition of poetry in English.

Chapter One

Authenticity and Allusion.

1.1. Literature and life.

How a work of art comes into existence, and the nature of the relation it bears to the artist's own life, are recurrent concerns in T. S. Eliot's criticism. He emphasises the important role of personal memories, at the same time brooding on his own uncertainty, both as to why some images present themselves in the memory more vividly and insistently than others, and as to what those images might signify:

The song of one bird, the leap of one fish, [...] six ruffians seen through an open window playing cards at night at a small French railway junction where there was a water-mill: such memories may have a symbolic value, but of what we cannot tell, for they represent the depths of feeling into which we cannot peer.¹

The creative applicability of two of these particular images to the poem "Journey of the Magi" will seem clear², though it is not in the origin but in the transmuting of such memories within a new context that such images first truly take on significance, at least as far as the reader is concerned. And just as the sources of individual art images may seem strange, so the process of their combination into the larger work of art itself is a complex one:

When a poet's mind is perfectly equipped for its work, it is constantly amalgamating disparate experience; the ordinary man's experience is chaotic, irregular, fragmentary. The latter falls in love, or reads Spinoza, and these two experiences have nothing to do with each other, or with the noise of the typewriter or the smell of cooking; in the mind of the poet these experiences are always forming new wholes.³

The opposition of falling in love to reading philosophy, or, rather, the association of the two activities, is an interesting and perhaps significant one in view

¹ *The Use of Poetry and the Use of Criticism* (hereafter *UOP*) (London: Faber and Faber, 1933), p.148.

² *Collected Poems 1909-1962 (ECP)* (London: Faber and Faber, 1974), pp.109-10 (p.109).

³ "The Metaphysical Poets", *Selected Prose (SP)*, ed. John Hayward (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1953), pp.111-20 (p.117).

of Eliot's comments elsewhere on his initial development as a poet, comments which I will discuss in due course. What is certainly implied is that the experience (that is, the reading) of literature is itself not necessarily qualitatively different from the wider experience of "life", and that literature is itself one of the components of life that provide the sources for other literature. This obvious point may hardly seem worth stating, but this possible difficulty in differentiating between literature and life as material for art is itself something that yet requires its own cautionary differentiation. In his introduction to a selection of Pound's poetry, Eliot noted that

There is a shallow test which holds that the original poet goes direct to life, and the derivative poet to 'literature'. When we look into the matter, we find that the poet who is really 'derivative' is the poet who *mistakes* literature for life, and very often the reason he makes this mistake is that - he has not read enough. The ordinary life of ordinary cultivated people is a mush of literature and life. There is a right sense in which for the educated person literature *is* life, and life *is* literature; and there is also a vicious sense in which the same phrases may be true. We can at least try not to confuse the material and the use which the author makes of it.⁴

This passage makes its points by two inextricable paradoxes: the first - that the way for a poet to avoid seeing life as just a form of literature, or literature as a form of life, is to read *more* literature; the second - that to see life and literature as identical may be a beneficial thing, but that it may also be a detrimental one, and that this potentially hazardous confusion does not require any further clarification here, or indeed *any* clarification. We could guess that Eliot's dark mutterings are directed at what are broadly termed the "aesthetes" of the late nineteenth century, and his comments elsewhere on the influence of Walter Pater seem to confirm that they are indeed his target: "His view of art [...] impressed itself upon a number of writers in the 'nineties, and propagated some confusion between life and art which is not wholly irresponsible for some untidy lives" ⁵.

Few writers have had more reason to ruminate on this problem than Eliot himself, for whom the verdict on Pater must have carried a double significance. In the first place, with the Edwardians being considered of little consequence by Eliot,

⁴ (Introduction to) Ezra Pound, *Selected Poems*, rev. edn (London: Faber and Faber, 1948) pp.10-11.

⁵ *Selected Essays (SE)* (London: Faber and Faber, 3rd edn, 1951), p.442.

these writers of the 1890s represented to him the (somewhat tangled) tail-ends of the poetic tradition to which he tried to attach himself, and the individual works of a number of these writers - Ernest Dowson, Austin Dobson, James Thomson, Lionel Johnson, as well as, of course, French poets of the period, principally Laforgue - strongly influence the language, imagery and tone of his earliest poetry, *Inventions of the March Hare* and *Prufrock and other Observations*. The second aspect of the problem is not simply that Eliot has to guard, in his work, against those 'nineties attitudes to which he was generally hostile, but that his own allusive method is a kind of mimicry of the art-life conflation he warns about in the passage above. It is not clear that Eliot *did* initially regard the *vicious* art-life experience as stemming from *too little* reading; his own earliest works are saturated with a wide range of allusions, and yet this is accompanied by (or rather, the technique itself articulates) a sense of ennui and dissatisfaction. Eric Griffiths explains:

His astounding powers of memory made the early Eliot feel old; he remembered what previous writers had written and, because he responded so vividly to their writing, their words recalled for him things that other people had desired. It was not himself alone he overheard when he realised that he was saying something that had been said before, nor only his own feelings that stirred him. Hence the odd spectacle in these poems [*Inventions of the March Hare*] of a distinctly new poetic voice worrying that it sounds hackneyed.⁶

Griffiths goes on to suggest that "Eliot grew into himself through making ever deeper his debt to those who wrote before him". What needs to be emphasised is the extent of allusive practice in even the earliest work. When a good case can be made for locating in an eight line poem about an assistant in a department store allusions to, or echoes of, Henry James, Gautier, Milton, Pope, Browning, Bertrand Russell, Shakespeare, Byron and Whistler⁷, it becomes hard to argue that the allusive technique in Eliot's poetry was merely plagiarism, or affectedness, or the exemplification of a reactionary view of the world. It started, at least, as a compulsion.

⁶ "Anticipations of Genius" (review of *Inventions of The March Hare*), *The Guardian*, Aug. 23 1996, G2, pp.1-3 (p.3).

⁷ "In the Department Store", *Inventions of the March Hare: Poems 1909-1917 (IOTMH)*, ed. Christopher Ricks (London: Faber and Faber, 1996), p.26, pp.211-14n.

And how to explain such a compulsion? We can try to detect sources for his poetry from our knowledge of Eliot's early life, and yet, it would appear, such a process only serves to turn around on itself and stress how much of his youth stems from and revolves around literature itself. We discover the shy child unable to play sports, who stayed indoors and delighted in word games and the reading and writing of adventure stories; who is captured in an early photograph, and in a portrait by one of his sisters, lying or curled up in a chair, immersed in a book; whose mother was herself a poet of some ability; the ten year old writer of imitations of Fitzgerald's *Rubaiyat*, who went through "the usual adolescent course" of the romantics; the sixteen year old who moved on to the 'nineties poets and the student who discovered Laforgue and Dante⁸. Of course, there is plenty more to Eliot's biography than just reading books, but this activity does seem to have played an unusually prominent part in his formation as a person. It is quite rightly considered valid, even useful, to try to understand a person's actions by reference to the social and historical contexts of his or her adult life or by psychoanalysis of what is known of his or her childhood. So, when one is dealing with a writer, especially a writer possessed of (or by) a memory of frankly abnormal powers, it is surely the case that examination of what the writer read as a child could merit some consideration.

And yet this approach brings with it its own limitations and confusions. Do the fog and shadows that take on a life of their own in "Prufrock" and other such poems allude back to the conflict between appearance and reality in Oscar Wilde's *Picture of Dorian Gray*?⁹ Or do they characterise, alongside the sentient darkness and airs of Virginia Woolf's *To The Lighthouse*, the modernist concern with fluid or multiple identities?¹⁰ Or is the writer simply revelling in childhood memories of the

⁸ See Lyndall Gordon, *Eliot's Early Years* (Oxford and London: Oxford University Press, 1977), and Robert Crawford, *The Savage and the City in the Work of T. S. Eliot*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987).

⁹ *The Picture of Dorian Gray (PODG)* (1890) ed. Peter Ackroyd (London: Penguin, 1985): "Noiselessly, and with silver feet, the shadows crept in from the garden" (p.115); "Gradually, white fingers creep through the curtain and they appear to tremble. In black fantastic shapes, dumb shadows crawl into the corners of the room and crouch there" (p.145), etc. The influence of this and other imagery from Wilde's book is fairly obvious in a number of Eliot's poems, notably in "Prufrock's Pervigilium" and "O little voices from the throats of men" (*IOTMH*, pp.43-44, 75-76), as well as "Gerontion" (*ECP*, pp.39-41).

¹⁰ *To the Lighthouse* (1927), ed. Stella McNicholl (London: Penguin, 1992), p.137: "Nothing, it seemed, could survive the flood, the profusion of darkness which, creeping in at keyholes and crevices,

“Shadow March” in Robert Louis Stevenson’s *A Child’s Garden of Verses*?¹¹ Perhaps all three, but we cannot say for certain. All of which is a roundabout way of admitting that while one perhaps cannot, and perhaps should not, separate the literature from the life or the life from the literature, my concern in this study is principally with literary rather than biographical or historical sources for the creation of Eliot’s poetry, though I do believe strong parallels with Eliot’s personal experience can be made.

1.2. The ennui of influence.

At this point, we might summarise as follows: that the associations which play a role in poetic influence and composition may be of the “life” kind or of the “literary” kind; and that these two kinds may be considered as equally personal in terms of the power and significance they hold over and for the poet; so that in a sense the distinction may appear artificial, restrictive or pointless. But just as Eliot has been at pains to distinguish between life and literature with respect to lived lives, so, for rather different reasons, the distinction between “life associations” and “literary associations” in the composition of literature is one I should like to maintain for the moment.

I make the distinction, in part, because despite Eliot’s eye-catching description of the poetic mind synthesising love, typing, cooking and Spinoza, the obvious (I take it) fact that these perhaps similarly intense experiences are nevertheless clearly *not* the same thing, may be seen to have an important bearing on the way the two putative kinds of association are differently employed in the making of his poetry - that is to say, with regard to memory and allusion. Eliot differs markedly from many writers, both in the extent to which his work *does* attempt to synthesise spinach and Spinoza, but perhaps more so in his evaluation of their *differences*. The factual existence of “life” associations demands, I hope, no argument; their explanation may be demanded

stole round window blinds, came into bedrooms, swallowed up here a jug and basin, there a bowl of red and yellow dahlias, there the sharp edges and firm bulk of a chest of drawers”; p.138: “certain airs, detached from the body of the wind [...] crept round corners and ventured indoors. Almost one might imagine them, as they entered the drawing-room, questioning and wondering, toying with the flap of hanging wall-paper, asking, would it hang much longer, when would it fall”.

¹¹ “All around the house is the jet-black night; / It stares through the window pane; / It crawls in the corners, hiding from the light, / And it moves with the moving flame”; “North West Passage” (2. “Shadow March”), *A Child’s Garden of Verses* (1890) (London and Glasgow: Blackie, 1975), p.47. Eliot mentions the childhood influence of Stevenson’s volume in *IOTMH*, p.112.

of a philosopher or a scientist. But one can, probably, speak with a little more certainty about literary associations and influences. Much of the rest of this study attempts to identify the nature and purposes of associations and allusions in Eliot's work - that is to say, the manifestations of influence - so my concern with influence at this point need not involve the childhood reading list I referred to above; rather, the point of interest is the general role and implications of literary influence upon a young writer, and it may be instructive to view Eliot's own theory and practice with regard to this in the light of Harold Bloom's related but contrasting discussion of "the anxiety of influence"¹².

Bloom's theory is that "strong" poets create their own identity, their own voice, by striving to escape the power of their predecessors through a process of appropriating and turning these influences to their own advantage. He identifies a number of techniques that characterise this process, such as "tessera" (or, completion or antithesis), "askesis" (or, purgation or solipsism) and "apophrades" (or, the return of the dead). There is not space here fully to discuss them, but all of these techniques involve poets deliberately misreading predecessors in an attempt to usurp them. I think it is fair to say that for Bloom's "strong" poet, the battle of influence is not simply a characteristic of poetry, it is its be all and end all. As Bloom himself states, and as the reader has probably already guessed, the two key figures behind his theory are Nietzsche and Freud (Bloom, p.8). One might also add Darwin, were it not for the fact that Bloom has in mind a poetic tradition of great but consecutively *less* great poets, from the pinnacle of Shakespeare, through Milton, to Wordsworth, Keats, and so on, a line progressively diminished by the increasing weight of influence and pointing inevitably to "the death of poetry in our tradition [...] self slain, murdered by its own past strength" (Bloom, p.10). Both the divergences from and parallels with Eliot's own vision of influence and tradition are striking and significant; in stressing the importance of influence, and in opposing the Emersonian attitude of rejecting or simply denying influence, Bloom appears to be in agreement with Eliot, but in degree, in exemplification, and in intention, he is quite different.

¹² *The Anxiety of Influence: A Theory of Poetry* (Oxford and London: Oxford University Press, 1973).

What is important is that Bloom is an advocate of a Romantic tradition in poetry. Since Romanticism emphasises the primacy of individual intuition and imagination, and since a tradition necessarily involves (outside) influence, influence is simultaneously antagonistic to and inseparable from poetry in Bloom's theory. It could probably go without saying that all good poets may fear being *over*-influenced by predecessors, but the degree of fear of influence that Bloom posits clearly has something to do with the fact that it is an exclusively Romantic tradition that he is discussing.

My reading of Bloom so far may be a misreading, but it is not a deliberate one. What is more interesting is Bloom's own misreading of Eliot himself in *The Anxiety of Influence*. Eliot is referred to explicitly on just a few occasions, mostly disparagingly and once approvingly. The negative comments are aimed at Eliot the critic and the positive one at Eliot the poet, to which latter instance I shall return shortly. The most significant reference to Eliot as critic finds him bizarrely set alongside Emerson as a "denier of influence" (Bloom, p.31), when Bloom recalls "the shibboleth bequeathed us by Eliot, that the good poet steals, while the poor poet betrays an influence, borrows a voice", an allusion to Eliot's "immature poets imitate; mature poets steal; bad poets deface what they take, and good poets make it into something better, or at least different" ("Philip Massinger"; *SE*, p.206). What is most odd about this rather elastic paraphrasing, and the company it is made to keep, is that on the very first page of *The Anxiety of Influence* Harold Bloom states "weaker talents idealize; figures of capable imagination appropriate for themselves" (Bloom, p.3). Presumably this applies to critics as well as poets. Here, Bloom attempts to conceal, by the use of rather longer words, the fact that his own theory is, in essence, Eliot's. The fact that Bloom's Romantic critical project is envisioned as almost directly opposed to Eliot's "classical" one necessitates a blindness to or misrepresentation of Eliot's statement by Bloom. Nowhere in the passage alluded to does Eliot use the words "influence" or "betray". In *The Anxiety of Influence*, Bloom is attempting critically the very same strategy that he identifies in poetry; the book is, in part, an attempt to kill Eliot the critic.

This criticism of Bloom is not meant gratuitously. Reservations here about his theory are a matter of degree rather than of principle. When he states that “poetic influence - when it involves strong, authentic poets - always proceeds by a misreading of the prior poet, an act of creative correction that is actually and necessarily a misinterpretation” (Bloom, p.30), my objection is to the word “always”. It is only “always” if one envisions all “authentic” poetry as an Oedipal struggle. In Eliot’s case it will be argued that this is only sometimes, or at least only partly, true. It is surely significant that Bloom’s one positive reference to Eliot comes in the final section, on “*Apophrades*: or The Return of the Dead”. The apophrades are “the dismal or unholy days on which the dead return to inhabit their former houses” (Bloom, p.141), and are used, in Bloom’s context, as a metaphor for instances in the late work of mature poets where attempts are made to leave a kind of poetic last testament, and the influences of the past return to haunt the hard-won individual voice. In the case of a poet such as Roethke, Bloom identifies the apophrades as a kind of devastation wherein his late work reverberates with the voices of other poets rather than his own (Bloom, pp.141-42). This engagement with other voices is, according to the theory, an unavoidable necessity in the late work of a poet, although, Bloom suggests,

with the very strongest there is a grand and final revisionary movement that purifies even this last influx. Yeats and Stevens, the strongest poets of our century, and Browning and Dickinson, the strongest of the later nineteenth century, can give us vivid instances of this most cunning of revisionary ratios. For all of them achieve a style that captures and oddly retains priority over their precursors, so that the tyranny of time almost is overturned, and one can believe, for startled moments, that they are being *imitated by their ancestors*.

(Bloom, p.141)

One of the examples of mastering the apophrades given by Bloom concerns Tennyson and Eliot: “In the exquisite squalors of Tennyson’s *The Holy Grail*, as Percival rides out on his ruinous quest, we can experience the hallucination of believing that the Laureate is overly influenced by *The Waste Land*, for Eliot too became a master at reversing the apophrades” (Bloom, p.142). Bloom subordinates Eliot to Stevens, but is forced to admit the former’s mastery of what is supposedly the crowning strategy of the “strongest” poets. Eliot is an anomaly here, since his mastery of the apophrades is achieved very early on in his career; there is not just the

Tennyson of *The Holy Grail* who “imitates” *The Waste Land*, there is also the Tennyson of *In Memoriam* imitating Eliot’s *Preludes*¹³, and the Wilde of “The Harlot’s House” imitating even earlier Eliot¹⁴. The apophrades are a recurrent feature of Eliot’s poetry, and he uses a number of methods to reverse them.

A fairly simple example may be given at this point, namely the trick of what we might call the “grammatical overthrow” of another line of poetry. When J. Alfred Prufrock sighs “I have heard the mermaids singing...” he is capping Donne’s “Teache me to heare mermaids singing”, and in a context of ennui and irony that further deflates both Donne’s speaker and Prufrock himself: “I have heard the mermaids singing, *each to each. / I do not think that they will sing to me*” (*ECP*, p.17; my italics). By a strange default, Prufrock occupies a rare position in folklore - Odysseus being the other example - of having heard mermaids singing and survived - survived because they have not been bothered even to lure him to his doom. Prufrock’s “strength” and significance as an individual voice and memory is partly the result of his failure and insignificance as a human being.

That even Eliot’s earliest poetry demonstrates familiarity and, in a technical sense, ease, with the apophrades - indeed, that they are a device *integral* to his technique - may cast doubt upon Bloom’s theory that they present the sternest challenge to an “authentic” poet’s individual style; Leonard Unger, too, has noted that Eliot seems to be the conspicuously-ignored exception which would test Bloom’s rules¹⁵. The problem here may be seen to stem from quite different conceptions in Bloom and Eliot as to what is “authentic”.

In Bloom’s theory, the struggle for authenticity is the struggle for a distinctly original voice. By contrast, the anxiety in Eliot’s early poetry is with language and meaning; the voice itself is, as Griffiths stated, “distinctly new”, but that voice expresses worries as to whether it can say anything that has not already been thought or said, and consequently it worries whether it is worth speaking at all. A number of

¹³ *In Memoriam* VII: “He is not here, but far away / The noise of life begins again, / And ghastly through the drizzling rain, / On the bald street breaks the blank day”, in *In Memoriam*, Maud and Other Poems, ed. John D. Jump (London: J. M. Dent and Sons, 1974), p.79.

¹⁴ “The Harlot’s House”, *The Complete Works of Oscar Wilde* (London and Glasgow: Collins, 1966), pp.789-90 (see my section 2.3).

¹⁵ *Eliot’s Compound Ghost: Influence and Confluence* (London: Pennsylvania University Press, 1981), p.95.

the poems in *Inventions of the March Hare* tail off in the final lines with the speaker seeming to lose either the interest or the will to keep thinking or speaking:

Oh, these minor considerations!... (IOTMH, p.13)

Among such scattered thoughts as these
We turn the corner of the street;
But why are we so hard to please? (p.14)

We are helpless. Still . . . it was unaccountable . . . odd . . .
Could not one keep ahead, like ants or moles?
Some day, if God -
But then what opening out of dusty souls! (p.49)

Between the theoretic seas
And your assuring certainties
I have my fears:
—I am off for some Hesperides
Of street pianos and small beers! (p.30)

There will be a blinding light and a little laughter
And the sinking blackness of ether
I do not know what, after, and I do not care either. (p.80)

This early voice owes something to Laforgue, but has very little of his playfulness, adopting instead a weary pose of having known it all already, known it all: “I feel like the ghost of youth / At the undertakers’ ball” (“Opera”, *IOTMH*, p.17). The new poetic voice which announces that it can hardly be bothered to speak is a striking trick which promises quickly to become tiresome; having stated its detachment from the present and the past, the poetic voice nevertheless has to reconnect with one or the other, or both, and it is primarily with the past, that is to say the influence of the *literary* past, that it chooses to re-engage; this choice will have a strong bearing on Eliot’s treatment of gender and employment of myth. It is in connection with this that I would like now to explain more fully my earlier insistence on differentiating between “life” associations and “literary” ones.

1.3. Associationism and the anxiety of interpretation.

The influence of theories of association from the eighteenth-century philosopher David Hartley, through to the theories and practice of modernists such as

Eliot, Yeats and Pound, has been traced by Cairns Craig¹⁶. Hartley proposed that the mind learns and develops primarily by accumulated associations of experience; as Craig explains, there is a difference between what the philosopher set out to develop and the use to which later writers attempted to put this mechanistic philosophy: "Hartley wanted to explain all mental phenomena by the principles of association - usually accepted as being contiguity, similarity and causality - but to trace these to physical stimuli, to neural mechanics." (Craig, p.36). Coleridge was initially drawn to this theory, but then rebelled as it seemed to him to cast the "associator" more as a passive recipient than as a self-willed agent. If we simplify this Romantic point of view, we might perhaps say that Coleridge is arguing for the primacy of the imagination over memory, a position which is naturally similar to Bloom's and rather different from - "opposite to" would probably be too strong a term - Eliot's. But Craig makes two important distinctions here: firstly, that when applied to art, associationist theory is "not an account of how art comes into existence, but of *how our experience of art is different from our experience of anything not art*" (Craig, p.36, my italics); secondly, and by extension, the theory *does* develop the self-willed agent that Coleridge insisted upon, but in the *reader* rather than in the poet, thus implying a "radically subjective aesthetic which, as several critics have noted, prefigures much twentieth-century discussion" (Craig, p.37). It is as if the greater and more "individual" status demanded by Romanticism for the poet leads to a similar demand in the reader, rendering the poet vulnerable once more - the poet has new power over the writing of poetry, but the reader gains a larger power as far as its ultimate creation, namely its interpreted meaning, is concerned. This unintended consequence of Romanticism is a *fait accompli* long before Eliot, Yeats and Pound start writing, and they are faced with the difficulty of trying to exert some renewed control over the flow of associations in the reader, "a reader whose whole context of associational experience may be entirely at variance with the author's" (Craig, p.63).

¹⁶ Craig, *Yeats, Eliot, Pound and the Politics of Poetry: Richest to the Richest* (London: Croom Helm, 1982); Hartley, "Various Conjectures on the Perception, Motion, and Generation of Ideas" (1746), transl. from the Latin by Robert E. A. Palmer, *The Augustan Reprint Society*, 77-78 (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1959; New York: Kraus Reprint, 1967), 27-58.

Craig identifies this anxiety particularly in Eliot's own problematical essay on *Hamlet*¹⁷. We might say that Eliot suffers not so much from an anxiety of influence as from an anxiety of interpretation, and that the latter is a consequence of the former. Bloom's "theory of poetry" is silent concerning classical modernism, focusing almost solely on Wallace Stevens from this period; and with good reason, for Bloom is implicitly attacking the post-romantic impostor - indeed, his book understands the terms "poetry" and "romantic" as being indivisible (e.g. Bloom, p.143). But the apophrades stop returning for no man - or critic - and one of the (presumably unintended) services that Bloom's theory performs is to render Eliot's grudge, as a poet, against Romanticism a little more understandable in retrospect, in view of the problem of interpretation that the Romantics had appeared to, unintentionally, set in motion. Consequently, just as Eliot remarks punningly of *vers libre* "no verse is free for the man who wants to do a good job" ("The Music of Poetry"; *SP*, pp.56-67 (p.65)), so, finding himself in this condition of outside interpretative threat, he intends that no association will be entirely free for his readers. In Eliot's project, Craig explains,

the multitudinous potential of a work will be defined *not in terms of the poet or reader's associative abilities* - though it can be realised only through those -but in the associative potential that is embedded in the very nature of and history of the language and its literature. (Craig, p.63, my italics)

That is to say, Eliot's concern is with re-establishing "the Tradition".

I have italicised passages in two of the above quotations from Craig; these refer, respectively, to the difference between the experience of art and that of life, and to the questionable relevance of personal ("life") associations of the poet. The former distinction (art/other life *experiences within life*) is paralleled by the latter (art/other life *associations within art*) in an odd way. What I mean is that the turning towards literature as a source of functional association implies a simultaneous questioning of the place of "life" associations in poetry. Autobiography becomes paradoxically inscrutable and inauthentic, in that its methods of selection from the entire context of life associations are seemingly arbitrary and its interpretation by the reader almost

¹⁷ Craig p.63; Eliot, "Hamlet and his Problems", *The Sacred Wood* 7th edn (London: Methuen, 1950), pp.95-103.

completely beyond the control of the author, whereas the reader has much less, though still some, input in creating the context for the interpretation of *literary* associations.

This is not to say that life associations are rejected as material for Eliot's poetry. Certainly, the memory of the ruffians playing cards in the vicinity of a watermill calls to mind, as I have noted, "The Journey of the Magi". But the point is not that, as Eliot says, "such memories may have a symbolic value, but of what we cannot tell", rather it is that the use of such memories is predicated on them carrying a symbolic value *in the later poetic context*. The six ruffians playing cards become "Six hands at an open door dicing for pieces of silver" (*ECP*, p.109), where the altered image conflates the betrayal by Judas and the dicing for Christ's clothes. And it is by altering the authentic life association that the authentic literary-historical association is made possible. The association must generally render itself compatible with a literary-historical predecessor or, if not obviously symbolic in this way, at least not distract too much from more clearly symbolic associations. Of course, another way of looking at this is to see the literary association as infusing with vitality the life association in lived experience or memory, but for the purposes of the poetry it is the literary association which takes priority, which is more authentic, more verifiable.

And the key term here is "authentic", whether one views Eliot's modernism in connection with Romanticism or with postmodernism. Eliot's "Tradition and the Individual Talent" (*SE*, pp.13-22) shares with that other influential essay in literary theory, Barthes "The Death of the Author"¹⁸, an emphasis on the interrelation of texts and a questioning of the notion of the author as an autonomous individual of the kind Bloom seeks, but for significantly different reasons. For Barthes, the text and its author cannot escape the influence of *readers*, by simple fact of the shared web of *linguistic interpretation*; for Eliot, the text and its author cannot escape the influence of *other texts and their authors*, by simple virtue of *literary association*. Neither of the essays stresses the particular influence they focus upon to the complete exclusion of the other, but it is fairly obvious why the poet Eliot chooses to emphasise the one and the critic Barthes the other. From a post-structuralist viewpoint, the fact of

¹⁸ Roland Barthes, *Image Music Text*, essays selected and transl. by Stephen Heath (London: Fontana, 1977), pp.142-48.

intertextuality questions the notion of authenticity, if we understand authenticity as uniqueness or autonomy; from Eliot's viewpoint, authenticity resides precisely *in* intertextuality. Intertextuality appears as a validation, as confirmation of legitimacy in return for an acknowledgement of filiality, though there are varied motivations for the allusive method in Eliot's work.

1.4. Influence and gender.

Eliot's attitudes towards influence may be related, in part, to some of those conditions in which he found himself, as a young poet, which were mentioned earlier: namely, his having ingested and moved on from the Romantics at quite an early age; his feelings of kinship, though with strong reservations, towards the poets of the 1890s, and his inability to connect with those of the early Twentieth Century. Of the second and third of these groups, Eliot wrote in later life:

In the first decade of the century the situation was unusual. I cannot think of a single living poet, in either England or America, then at the height of his powers, whose work was capable of pointing the way to a young poet conscious of the desire for a new idiom. It was the tail-end of the Victorian era. Our sympathies, I think, went out to those who are known as the English poets of the nineties, who were all, with one exception, dead. The exception was W. B. Yeats.¹⁹

Yeats and not Swinburne, who was certainly not considered by Eliot as one of the true 'nineties poets. The fact that most of these poets had "died of drink or suicide or one thing and another"²⁰ was frankly acknowledged both as a cause for regret and as a stroke of good fortune for the young Eliot, on the grounds that

had [the nineties poets] survived, they might have spoken in an idiom sufficiently like my own to have made anything I had to say superfluous. They had been in contact with France, and they might have exhausted the possibilities of a cross-fertilisation from symbolist poetry (as they called it) before I had a chance.²¹

¹⁹ *To Criticise the Critic (TCTC)* (London: Faber and Faber, 1965), p.58.

²⁰ Interview in *Paris Review* (Spring-Summer 1959) (excerpt), in *IOTMH*, p.398.

²¹ "Tradition and the Practice of Poetry", lecture, Dublin 1936, *Southern Review* (Autumn 1988) (excerpt), in *IOTMH*, p.395.

The ousting of one's poetic ancestors is greatly eased when they themselves physically assist in this act reasonably young in life. It is true that the concern Eliot expresses here is the Bloomian one of having a distinctive voice, but the important point is that this problem, so far as he was concerned, had eliminated itself quite effectively.

Eliot displays an equally pragmatic attitude regarding favourable influence for a young poet in his late essay "What Dante means to me" (*TCTC*, pp.125-7) when he recalls the effect of the minor French poet Laforgue,

the first to teach me how to speak, to teach me the poetic possibilities of my own idiom of speech. Such influences, the influences which, so to speak, introduce one to oneself, are, I think, due to an impression which is in one aspect, the recognition of a temperament akin to one's own, and in another aspect the discovery of a form of expression which gives a clue to the discovery of one's own form. These are not two things, but two aspects of the one thing. But the poet who can do this for a young writer is unlikely to be one of the great masters. The latter are too exalted and too remote. They are like distant ancestors who have been almost deified; whereas the smaller poet, who has directed one's first steps, is more like an admired elder brother. (*TCTC*, pp.125-26)

Here is another slant on the poetic Oedipus complex: in that distant ancestors have been "almost deified", they may be treated for the moment as "almost dead", as absent fathers; to struggle with them is, for the *young* poet, either impossible or irrelevant, and certainly fruitless. More recent minor poets are actually physically dead and their oeuvres incomplete - they become elder brothers who never quite lived to become head of the family. One can, of course, read such a construction of filiality and fraternity as a cunning evasion or blindness on the part of the young poet, but Eliot was not young when he wrote the above passage; in 1950 his position among living poets in English was long-established and not challenged.

Additionally, Eliot offered a third, intriguing way of envisioning the attachment between the young poet and his influences, in 1919 in *The Egoist*, where he seems to be referring again to Laforgue:

This relation is a feeling of profound kinship, or rather of a peculiar kind of personal intimacy, with another, probably a dead author. [...] it is certainly a crisis; and when a young author is seized with his first passion of this sort he

may be changed, metamorphosed almost, within a few weeks even, from a bundle of second hand sentiments into a person. The imperative intimacy arouses for the first time a real, an unshakeable confidence. That you possess this secret knowledge, this intimacy with the dead man, that after a few or many years or centuries you should have appeared, with this indubitable claim to distinction; who can penetrate at once the thick and dusty circumlocutions about his reputation, can call yourself alone his friend [...]. Like personal intimacies in life, it may and probably will pass, but it will be ineffaceable.²²

This takes the concept of poetic kinship even further from the Bloomian idea. The older poet here is not even a member of one's own family, whether brother or father - Laforgue belongs to another linguistic family - and is likened instead to a close friend, as a lover even. He is also, again, possibly dead, but not always deified or even awaiting such promotion, rather he is almost forgotten. He is no threat, indeed he is someone partially dependent on the living poet for his rebirth, a reversal of influence which is certainly true of Laforgue in English literary history. Finally, Eliot suggests that this third type of relationship is a useful inoculation against "forced admiration. From attending to writers simply because they are great" (*IOTMH*, p.400). Eliot's explanation, which maintains the metaphor of the love affair, manages to offer comfort to an audience which feels forced to look up to great poets, at the same time as he clearly reminds it of its inadequacies:

We are never at ease with people who, to us, are merely great. We are not ourselves great enough for that: probably not one man in each generation is great enough to be intimate with Shakespeare. Admiration for the great is only a sort of discipline to keep us in order, a necessary snobbism to make us mind our places. We may not be great lovers; but if we have a genuine affair with any poet of any degree we have acquired a monitor to remind us when we are not in love. (*IOTMH*, p.400)

All this might seem to indicate that, by his own theory at least, Eliot does not conform to a Bloomian-Freudian idea of influence. There is very little evidence for an argument that Eliot is in some kind of Oedipal relationship with literary forefathers; as I have suggested, this may explain why Bloom is so quiet with regard to Eliot as an exemplar of this kind of theory. This is not to over-idealise Eliot, rather it is to point

²² "Reflections on Contemporary Poetry" [4], *The Egoist* (July 1919) (excerpt), in *IOTMH*, pp.399-400.

out that as an analogy for poetic influence, Bloom's paradigm is self-limiting in the way that it is gendered. As Freud does, Bloom emphasises the father-son strand of the myth, ignoring the concomitant relationship with the mother, whereas it is the latter relationship that would seem more applicable, symbolically and biographically, to Eliot's case. It is known that Eliot's principal source of encouragement as a young poet came from his mother, herself a poet of some ability, and also that this had poignant consequences; Eliot later told his second wife that when he was sixteen his mother came across some of his poems in a school newspaper, and remarked that "she thought them better than anything in verse she had ever written. I knew what her verse meant to her. We did not discuss the matter further"²³. So far as one might wish to read a symbolic struggle here, Eliot was guilty of accidental matricide at a young age.

The female influence is evident in more than simply Eliot's relationship with his mother-as-poet. In the context of growing critical interest, in recent years, in the feminine in Eliot's work, Carol Christ has suggested that Eliot's poetic voice was defined in a feminine context that included literary tradition and literary culture as well as the biographical situation. Pointing to Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar's work on the "increasingly feminized literary culture in which women writers, editors and patrons played important roles"²⁴ during the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, she also argues for a rather different state of affairs regarding the poetic idiom to Bloom's masculine struggle:

All the poets important in evolving the mellifluous erotic lyricism of the nineteenth century against which the modernists reacted - Shelley, Keats, Tennyson, the Pre-Raphaelites - were subject to the charge of feminizing poetry, often in those poems about women that define the characteristics of poetic vision and style. Thus the portrait of a lady in nineteenth-century poetry implies a debate about the gender of the poetical. (Christ, p.24)

²³ *Poems Written in Early Youth (PWIEY)*, (London: Faber and Faber, 1967), pp.7-8.

²⁴ Carol Christ, "Gender Voice and Figuration in Eliot's Early Poetry", in *T. S. Eliot: The Modernist in History*, ed. Ronald Bush (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), pp.23-27, p.25. Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar, *No Man's Land: The Place of the Woman Writer in the Twentieth Century*, Vol. I (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1988), pp.30-31. Regarding the feminised romantic idiom, particularly in the case of Keats, see also Anne K. Mellor, *Romanticism and Gender* (London and New York: Routledge, 1993), pp.171-212.

Christ gives as examples of such portraits “Andrea del Sarto”, “The Blessed Damozel”, “The Gardener’s Daughter” and “Mariana” (Christ, p.24), and she discusses the influence of this mode of portrait upon, and alteration by, the Eliot of “Prufrock” and “Portrait of a Lady”. She detects in these poems a struggle between male and female voices, voices which enact “a drama of betrayal and appropriation”. We can see the “betrayal”, in terms of theme and plot, in “Portrait of a Lady” and “La Figlia Che Piange”; what Christ means by “appropriation” is the mimicry, ventriloquism, satirising, of the women who speak in these poems. Explicitly rebutting Bloom, Christ suggests that “Eliot imagines the literary past as a woman, whom he deserts, dishonours, even murders while he appropriates her voice”. Consequently, she argues, “Eliot’s gendering of this drama of betrayal - a gendering already implicit in the feminization of poetic idiom in the nineteenth century - allows him at once to enact and mask issues of poetic influence” (Christ, p.27).

So, according to Christ’s theory, the female presence in Eliot’s early poetry is a matter of both form and content, of idiom and theme. There is a quite logical irony in Eliot’s strategy as enacted: the women in his poems are granted a voice where those of nineteenth-century portraits are very often denied one; those are idealised but mute, his are able to speak, but what they say is carefully managed by the poet, often for satirical effect. Since, if Christ is correct, Eliot views the poetic idiom he inherits as being feminised, that it is a voice taking the female as its subject and style, then this overarching *feminine* voice can perhaps be dealt with by translating or fragmenting it into discrete female “voices” (which may also include simply descriptive or narrative passages in this feminine idiom²⁵), between which voices may be established and distinguished an idiom for the separate male narrator.

As well as a tendency to present the woman’s voice as “spoken” (that is, in quotation marks) and the man’s as unspoken - therefore unregistered by the owner of the female voice, but no less “audible” to the reader, indeed intimately directed towards this “outside” figure²⁶ - Eliot sometimes, though not exclusively,

²⁵ For example, the lush, Tennysonian style of about half of “La Figlia Che Piange”, particularly the first stanza, which is counterpointed in the second by a Dantean style, and in the third by the Laforgueian closing lines (*ECP*, p.36, see my Chapter Four).

²⁶ Notably in the first part of “A Game of Chess” in *The Waste Land*, though interestingly this is not the case in the pub scene, where the speech of Lil’s friend is not set in quotation marks. Even then, the

differentiates the kind of language attributed to the male and female, and it is here that the early influence of Laforgue is important. Lachlan MacKinnon, comparing Laforgue unfavourably with Baudelaire as a model for Eliot, notes disapprovingly the former's use of exaggeratedly cold and technical language as a contrast for conventionally romantic imagery, viewing this as a rather crude form of irony²⁷. This is not an unfair assessment of Laforgue, but the attractions of this "masculine" idiom for Eliot would be obvious. His own use of highly Latinate or scientific language is largely confined to *Poems 1920* (ECP, pp.39-60), though it reaches its highest point (or lowest depth) in the deliberately wordy and obscure early poem "The Triumph of Bullshit" (1910), wherein scientific spleen is directed at an unsuspecting female readership²⁸. It is important to note that the amount of ostensibly "masculine" writing in Eliot's idiom is not great, and that "feminine" writing, in style if not intention, is more common. What Eliot certainly retains for frequent use is Laforgue's tone of a detachment which has a withering effect, both upon the objects concerned and on the speaker. The final feature of the idiom, indeed Eliot's all-purpose joker card, is allusion.

1.5. Allusion and the interpretation of anxiety.

I have suggested earlier that literary association takes priority over life association in Eliot's work, and that life associations are validated in this context only by them being remodelled to fit a literary or historical framework, my example being the hands dicing for silver in "The Journey of the Magi". Allusion consists, in part, of

capitalised "HURRY UP PLEASE ITS TIME" can still be seen, though, (ECP, pp.66-69) as intruding upon this comparatively stabilised female speech, or even, if one attends to the lack of an apostrophe in "ITS", as lurking beneath the speech at a deeper level of meaning. With its stage-whisper effect, the "spoken" female and "silent" male voice in "Portrait of a Lady" (ECP, pp.18-22) seems to serve a more obviously satiric purpose than is the case in *The Waste Land*, where this device suggests, predominantly, the isolation of the characters from each other.

²⁷ Eliot, Auden, Lowell: *Aspects of the Baudelairean Inheritance* (London: Macmillan, 1983), p.24.

²⁸ e.g. ll.1-8: Ladies, on whom my attentions have waited
If you consider my merits are small
Etiolated, alembicated,
Orotund, tasteless, fantastical,
Monotonous, crotchety, constipated,
Impotent galamatias
Affected, possibly imitated,
For Christ's sake stick it up your ass.

(IOTMH, p.307)

simple validation of a later work by making literary associations - for instance Milton and Pope allude to Homer and Virgil and to the Bible, but in the context of a shared literary culture with their readership. Classical sources are referred to as a source of authority, the very act of reference being a labour-saving device understood and accepted by such a readership. That is not to say that the source material is not in some way altered by this - the selective nature of allusion makes this unavoidable - but such recontextualisations are not generally intended to do damage to the sources. Eliot is in a different situation, both when he wrote and today. His own approaches to the works he alludes to vary greatly. Dante and Shakespeare are granted almost unconditional respect, whilst other writers, even those he admires, are to a greater or lesser extent fair game. Elements of such writers' works are parodied, satirised, sometimes disfigured by Eliot's allusions, or very often forced into a context far removed from their origin; indeed, sometimes the alteration is so severe, while remaining barely recognisable, that it appears the poet is more intent on his own identifications and associations than with his readership "getting" an allusion. As I have stated earlier, the allusive technique appears to me to be a compulsion in Eliot, an ingrained mode of writing, and his motives for using allusions may vary wildly. What it seems to allow him is a certain freedom, as a "classicist", from the restrictions of tradition - particularly since he appears to view much of "the Tradition" as heretical: that is, romantic and feminised - as allusions are used not only to bolster and be bolstered by the tradition, but also retrospectively to alter and reconfigure that tradition to suit Eliot. This is the subject of "Tradition and the Individual Talent".

There are several questions that may be raised here with regard to allusion: does the reader have to identify allusions in order to understand the poetry? How are we supposed to identify an allusion as an allusion in the first place? What are we supposed to do with such allusions once identified? And how can the author hope to control the "correct" interpretation of such allusions by readers? Such questions are concerns of this whole study. What should become clear is that they were, in one sense, of only minor interest to Eliot. He warned of readers suffering from "gallery fright", the constraining determination not to be caught out, the desire to "get" the hidden meaning of a so-called difficult work at the cost of being genuinely receptive

to their own responses (*UOP*, p.150), and he also acquiesced in the idea that the meaning of a poem is simply what it means to its readers (*SP*, pp.56-67, pp.57-58). Indeed it will be argued that, while allusion is of central importance to Eliot's poetic method, his use of it is often so veiled as to indicate that his primary concern is with the validation of his work by parallels with other literature which *only he* is likely to recognise, and that is why I have called it a compulsion. Allusion of this kind may be likened to the language of ritual; that is to say, it proceeds from an idea that language can carry meaning regardless of the existence of an audience to understand or even simply hear it, and this is partly why I am linking allusion with myth in this study, concentrating quite largely on Eliot's "ritualistic" reworkings of other literary texts, texts which are themselves, of course, often reworkings. The role of gender in these reworkings is, as suggested above, a role both of subject matter and of idiom.

In any case, at this point it may be helpful to sketch out some possible ways of looking at these problems - which nevertheless remain for the reader, regardless of the author's goodwill or indifference - by way of reference to a few sites of allusive interest in "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock". What follows is not intended as a discussion of the whole poem, to which I shall return in the next chapter. Rather, the examples I have chosen are intended to throw light upon the function - or malfunction - of allusion within those contexts of gendered influence and idiom to which I have been referring.

We may start with the lines from near the end of the poem which I touched upon earlier:

I have heard the mermaids singing, each to each.
I do not think that they will sing to me.

The first of these two lines is the subject of examination by W. K. Wimsatt and Monroe C. Beardsley in the essay "The Intentional Fallacy"²⁹, where they attempt to evaluate its admissibility as an allusion to the line of Donne I also mentioned, "Teach me to heare mermaides singing". Their approach is to ask "whether it makes any

²⁹ "The Intentional Fallacy"(1946), in W.K. Wimsatt's *The Verbal Icon: Studies in the Meaning of Poetry* (Lexington, Kentucky: [N. P.], 1954), reproduced in *20th Century Literary Criticism: A Reader*, ed. David Lodge (London: Longman, 1972), pp.333-45.

sense if Eliot-Prufrock *is* thinking about Donne?" They are disinclined to think so:

the exegetical enquirer may wonder whether mermaids considered as 'strange sights' (to hear them is in Donne's poem analogous to getting with child a mandrake root) have much to do with Prufrock's mermaids, which seem to be symbols of romance and dynamism, and which incidentally have literary authentication, if they need it, in a line of a sonnet by Gérard de Nerval. This method of inquiry may lead to the conclusion that the given resemblance between Eliot and Donne is without significance and is better not thought of, or the method may have the disadvantage of providing no certain conclusion. Nevertheless, we submit that this is the true and objective way of criticism. (Wimsatt and Beardsley, p.344)

I suggested earlier that the "allusion" to Donne here entailed a kind of capping by the later poet, which is simultaneously an admission of failure by Prufrock himself; he has heard the mermaids sing, but not to him. Wimsatt and Beardsley's refusal to see why Eliot-Prufrock might be referring to Donne's poem stems from, I think, a misunderstanding of the putative source. The mandrake root is not simply a "strange sight", it is more importantly a strange *sound*: its voice is supposedly fatal to anyone who hears it, just like the voices of mermaids. The mermaids in "Prufrock" are placed in just such a context, though here it is ironically "human voices" that wake Prufrock from his magical reverie and metaphorically drown him. The mermaids are indeed "romantic and dynamic", as mermaids generally are, but they are also dangerous, and in a particularly new way here - by ignoring Prufrock (or simply by not existing in the outside world) they condemn him to a kind of imaginative death to be inflicted by the voices of others. So there is a thematic reversal of the traditional in this allusion, but one that is still clearly related to the folklore association of mermaid's voices and doomed humans.

Aside from this peculiar obtuseness on the part of Wimsatt and Beardsley, the rest of the faults in the quoted piece hardly need pointing out, but are nevertheless instructive regarding the problems of identifying and interpreting allusions: first, the unexplained assumption that a line can carry only one and not multiple allusions; and second, the idea that associations can and often *should* be "better not thought of", and forgotten by an act of conscious will. This is to misunderstand both the nature and the function of allusion in the context under discussion. Allusions are kinds of literary

associations, and like life associations they may be shadowy or abrupt in the manner of their appearance, and suggest varied and even contradictory meanings. Nor do they have to be admitted through the turnstile one at a time. What Eliot praised in Donne was his ability to experience a thought as one might experience a feeling³⁰, and this is precisely what is happening in the case of J. Alfred Prufrock with his memory of Donne's mermaids and Polonius, an experiencing of literature like life, which, however, has tipped over in this case into the kind of substitution of art *for* life, mentioned earlier, of which Eliot disapproved.

The second quotation I would like to consider involves those very voices which fill the mermaids' traditional role in the poem; it is the (once) repeated phrase,

In the room the women come and go
Talking of Michaelangelo.

(ECP, pp.13, 14)

This has tended to be understood as a misogynistic snipe, contrasting the triviality of women's talk with the heroic object of their chatter, the great Renaissance artist³¹. Christopher Ricks, however, has argued against such a reading by suggesting that the lines are echoing Christina Rossetti's "The Convent Threshold":

You looking earthward, what see you?
Milk-white wine-flushed among the vines,
Up and down leaping, to and fro,
Most glad, most full, made strong with wines,
Blooming as peaches pearled with dew,
Their golden windy hair afloat,
Love-music warbling in their throat,
Young men and women come and go.³²

The last lines complete what Ricks describes as "a thrillingly positive vision": "she was imagining a world where it was gladdening for women to come and go - except, indeed, that here the women are complemented by men"³³. The example does indeed

³⁰ "The Metaphysical Poets", *SP*, p.117.

³¹ e.g. Helen Gardner: "The absurdity of discussing his giant art, in high-pitched feminine voices, drifting through a drawing room, adds merely extra irony to the underlying sense of the lines"; *The Art of T. S. Eliot* (London: Cresset Press, 1949), p.84. See also Grover Smith, *T. S. Eliot's Poetry and Plays: A Study in Sources And Meaning* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1956), p.18.

³² *A Choice of Christina Rossetti's Verse*, selected with an introduction by Elizabeth Jennings (London: Faber and Faber, 1970), pp.51-52.

³³ *T. S. Eliot and Prejudice* (London: Faber and Faber, 1988), p.19.

offer an unexpected angle on “Prufrock” (though we should note that the speaker is referring to a world of experience which she has denied to herself), and we may find even more possible echoes of Victorian poets here. On the one hand, there is Austin Dobson’s “At the Convent Gate”, which seems to look *into* the Convent just where Rossetti’s poem looks *out*:

And note how dimly to and fro
The grave, gray-hooded Sisters go,
Like figures seen in dreams.³⁴

and on the other hand, the line “The young men come, the young men go” in Kipling’s poem “My Rival”³⁵. There do seem to be verbal similarities here, but what of thematic ones? Society women paralleled with nuns? Society women paralleled with young men? Or with young men *and* women? In fact, all of these possible parallels can make sense if we consider the context, in terms both of emotional states and of the action of the poem, in which Prufrock’s refrain occurs.

Certainly, there seems to be something of a sneering tone to the words of Eliot’s protagonist, but Prufrock is also a man consumed by fear and self-doubt (“Do I dare?”), who is evidently trying to pluck up the courage to ask an “overwhelming question” to one of these women; perhaps, say, a proposal of marriage. Prufrock may fear “my rival” who would come and go with the decisiveness of the women, who would not hesitate to talk. No “young men” are actually found in “Prufrock”, but this is in part a reminder that Prufrock himself is no longer a young man (“I grow old, I grow old”). In fact, in Kipling’s poem, the rivalry is between a young woman and an older, married one who receives all the attention of a coterie of young men, which was a feature of colonial society; but the frustrated young woman does provide a camp parallel to the character of Prufrock, leaving aside the difference in age - youth being to her detriment as Prufrock’s own advancing years are to him: “I’m very gauche and very shy, / Her jokes aren’t in my line; / And worst of all I’m seventeen / While she is forty nine” (Kipling, p.23)³⁶. On the other hand, perhaps “my rival” is

³⁴ Austin Dobson: *The Complete Poetical Works* (London: Humphrey Milford, 1923), p.165.

³⁵ *Kipling’s Verse: Definitive Edition* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1940), pp.22-23.

³⁶ Interestingly, Kipling’s poem trivialises the young men just as Eliot’s is generally taken to trivialise the women in the room: the young men are “Each pink and white and neat, / She’s older than their

there in the form of Michaelangelo, the focus of (presumably) adoration by the women; Prufrock can never hope to be compared with him as an artist, nor, probably, with one of his heroic male nudes (“(They will say: ‘But how his arms and legs are thin!’)”). This possible element of the allusive operation in these lines might, then, suggest that Prufrock’s sneering at the women is a symptom of his own crisis of masculinity, and this rings true, psychologically, in the poem as a whole.

The second part of the allusive operation, “the grave gray-hooded Sisters”, could be viewed as the corollary of the first. Prufrock, on seeing the women come and go, thinks (consciously or not) of his own possible role as suitor (“young men and women come and go”) and curses the women, wishing them transfigured from outside Rossetti’s nunnery to inside Dobson’s - wishful thinking, as he is “not Prince Hamlet”. Or perhaps this is not so much a curse as an anguished, and distorted, evocation of the pure and saintly woman, who additionally does not talk - this is certainly the emotional tone of Dobson’s poem. In any case, the ghostly description of the nuns disconcerts even more: “Grave gray-hooded”, “figures seen in dreams”. There is a deathliness or doom-laden feel to the associations I have been discussing; Prufrock senses his own doom and associates it with the women accordingly. They seem to be ignoring Prufrock, and in this they point forward to the mermaids; so their talk is not necessarily trivial to Prufrock: in its exclusion of him, verbally and imaginatively, it is crushing.

One final thing could be said about the “coming and going” movement depicted here. Such motion may suggest either a kind of repetitive stasis or a fleeting and phantom-like atmosphere. Prufrock feels himself simultaneously haunted and excluded by women in these lines. One does not need to identify the possible allusions I have suggested in order to sense all this, but they may augment and colour our understanding of Prufrock’s character and mind. If they are acceptable to the reader as allusions, then we can also see that they are working at an integral level of subtlety and complexity, one which is much more than being simply self-advertising, pretentious or elitist. They are not paraded, in the example above, as evidence of

mothers, but, / They grovel at her feet”. Eliot may be understood, here, as subverting Kipling’s own subversion of gender stereotypes, a “correction” technique I discuss particularly with regard to *The Waste Land* in Chapter Five.

Prufrock's learning - he makes far more explicit references elsewhere to great figures from art and history, with the usual accompanying feeling of worthlessness. Instead they occur almost unwanted by the speaker, only semi-consciously - if at all - advertising even more extreme fears than those he articulates consciously. The poet's success at manipulating and controlling allusion in the poem "Prufrock" is founded on situating them in the mind of his puppet protagonist where their involuntary appearance is tellingly inappropriate. Indeed, Prufrock's attitude towards women is open to more psychoanalytical head-shaking if we hazard a guess as to one of the sources for the line "But though I have wept and fasted, wept and prayed" (*ECP*, p.16) and its context of fear and weakness with regard to the never-to-be-made proposal; here is a suggestion:

I have wearied Heaven with prayers, dried up
The spring of my continual tears, even starved
My veins with daily fasts: what wit or art
Could counsel I have practised; but alas,
I find all these but dreams and old men's tales
To fright unsteady youth; I'm still the same.
Or I must speak or burst. 'Tis not, I know,
My lust, but 'tis my fate that leads me on.
Keep fear and low faint-hearted shame with slaves;
I'll tell her that I love her, though my heart
Were rated at the price of that attempt.
O me ! She comes.³⁷

And goes. This passage is from Ford's *'Tis Pity She's a Whore*, and is spoken by Giovanni, a young man consumed by incestuous love for his sister. The strong echoes to be found, in my opinion, in "Prufrock", make an unfortunate association for the reader (not to say the protagonist, if he is aware of them), not least because the lovers in Ford's play end up dead.

The examples I have used from "Prufrock" may give the impression that Eliot's allusions are generally satirical or destructive in their intent. This is not, of course, the whole truth, and in the following chapters, particularly the final one, I hope to make clear how the allusive technique, in conjunction with the use of poetic masks, also enables in Eliot's poetry a constructive concept and treatment of myth. At

³⁷John Ford, *'Tis Pity She's a Whore*, ed. Brian Morris (London: A&C Black, 1968), I. ii. 147-58.

the same time, this treatment will be suggested as being in close relation (and in some respects, in direct opposition) to the kind of allusive construction of gender just discussed. There is more to say in due course about “The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock” and how its protagonist attempts to combine the mythic quest and the tea party; the last words of this chapter may go to another of Prufrock’s literary ancestors, another aesthete and flâneur, the rather more fashionable Lord Henry Wotton:

‘I have known everything’, said Lord Henry, with a tired look in his eyes, ‘but I am always ready for a new emotion. I am afraid, however, that, for me at any rate, there is no such thing. Still, your wonderful girl may thrill me. I love acting. It is so much more real than life. Let us go.’³⁸

³⁸ Wilde, *PODG*, p.89. (Cf. Dorian, (p.159): “Yet one had ancestors in literature, as well as in one’s own race, nearer, perhaps in type and temperament, [...] He felt that he had known them all, those strange terrible figures that had passed across the stage of the world and made sin so marvellous, and evil so full of subtlety”; Prufrock, (*ECP*, p.14): “For I have known them all already, known them all—” etc.) Note Lord Henry’s “I am always ready for a new emotion”; cf. Eliot: “The emotion in [hypothetical poet’s] poetry will be a very complex thing, but not with the complexity of people who have very complex or unusual emotions in life. One error, in fact, of eccentricity in poetry is to seek for new human emotions to express; and in this search for novelty in the wrong place it discovers the perverse.” (“Tradition and the Individual Talent”; *SE*, p.21). Prufrock and Lord Henry seem to concur with Eliot on the impossibility of finding “new human emotions”, though Eliot does allow for “new art emotions” (*SE*, p.20), that is: existing emotions which have not before been properly or fully rendered in art. (Lord Henry and Prufrock still appear to have difficulty in telling them apart.)

Chapter Two

Marionette and Quester: Public and Private Ritual.

2.1. Romantic irritations and classical convictions.

I have argued so far that Eliot's poetic anxiety is rather more one of interpretation than of influence, and that his compulsive use of allusion is symptomatic of this. The particular examples I have offered so far have been related to the idea that Eliot starts writing in a poetic environment where idiom and subject matter have become increasingly "feminised" from the Romantic period onwards. I have broadly characterised Eliot's response to his context as one of "classicism" versus "romanticism". My use of these terms obviously requires some qualification, especially when they are to be related to the slippery term "myth". For instance, we have seen that Carol Christ's characterisation of romanticism as possessed of a feminised or feminising idiom is quite at odds with Harold Bloom's view of it as embodying a masculine struggle. As for classicism, Eliot's brand of it is a highly individual attempt to re-instate an anti-individualist poetic, and, despite his famous 1928 statement of allegiance to it (along with Royalism and Anglo-Catholicism)¹, he did also qualify and even question the value of using the term "classicist" at all, suggesting later that to try to distinguish between classicism and romanticism was probably a misguided and vain endeavour.²

Bernard Bergonzi, too, has argued along such lines, noting also that the fragmentary format of some of Eliot's work - principally, *Coriolan* and *Sweeney*

¹ *For Lancelot Andrewes: Essays in Style and Order (FLA)*, rev. edn (London: Faber and Faber, 1970), p.7.

² "I doubt whether any author has done himself anything but harm by attempting to write as a 'romantic' or as a 'classicist'. No sensible author, in the midst of something that he is trying to write, can stop to consider whether it is going to be romantic or the opposite. At the moment when one writes, one is what one is, and the damage of a lifetime, and of having been born in an unsettled society, cannot be repaired at the moment of composition". (The implied preference for classicism is clear, though, I take it.) From *After Strange Gods* (London: 1934, Faber and Faber; withdrawn from print), quoted in *SP*, p.31. Even in the same passage where he made his tripartite declaration, Eliot conceded that the term "classicist" "is completely vague, and easily lends itself to clap-trap" (*FLA*, p.7).

Agonistes - follows the example of the Romantic poets. But Bergonzi's suggestion that Eliot's adherence to classicism was "superficial"³ may be an underestimation. Whatever the rights and wrongs of Eliot's distinction between classicism and romanticism, his own perception that he was fighting as a classical poet against romanticism strongly informs his early poetry, at least up to the mid nineteen-thirties. As such, it should not be ignored as a significant dynamic in the creation of his works, and it is for this reason that I will still employ the term "classical" - loosely - to describe Eliot. Among the unpublished pieces that comprise *Inventions of the March Hare*, there is a plan for a poem of three stanzas, each to be headed by a line from the words on the gates of Hell in Dante's *Inferno* (*IOTMH*, p.83). The only lines in English follow the third line of Italian, "*La somma sapienza e il primo amore*"⁴:

O lord, have patience
 Pardon these derelictions —
 I shall convince these romantic irritations
 By my classical convictions.

In the absence, at this stage in his life, of specific religious convictions, classicism takes on the role of a dogma; unfinished and undated as the poem is, these lines define well the predominant attitude to be found in the early poetry.

If one were to make a list of the basic characteristics ascribed to classicism and romanticism respectively, it would not be hard to draw some clear distinctions: impersonality versus individuality, tradition versus progress; economy of style versus superabundance; detachment versus overflow of feeling. This is certainly a simplification - in part, of Eliot's own critical making - and it may be argued that these terms are not necessarily always "versus" each other, and that the terms can be individually misunderstood even when considered separately from this construction of opposites⁵. Nevertheless, they are, I think, fair indicators of the kind of thing

³ T. S. Eliot (London: Macmillan, 1972), pp.114-17 (p.106).

⁴ "The highest wisdom and the first love".

⁵ For instance, the common tendency to emphasise Wordsworth's "spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings" at the expense of his important qualifier, namely that such poetry should be "emotion recollected in tranquillity". In "Tradition and the Individual Talent" Eliot takes issue even with this qualifier: "For it is neither emotion, nor recollection, nor, without a distortion of meaning, tranquillity. It is a concentration, and a new thing resulting from the concentration, of a very great number of experiences which to the practical and active person would not seem to be experiences at all [...]"

prized or deplored in the two notional strands of literature by those who are moved to take a stand on behalf of one against the other. (It might be borne in mind, here, that the distinction between *romantic* and *classical* was originally one made by continental European writers in the early nineteenth century, and it was not one which British writers of the time generally shared; indeed Byron and Carlyle claimed to find it meaningless⁶). What is perhaps more interesting is where the two strands seem to run very closely to each other, and this seems to be most strongly the case when we talk about the themes of myth and mysticism.

The employment of myth, particularly Latin and Greek myth, both as subject matter and as a form of associational shorthand, is, it hardly needs to be stated, an almost constant feature of poetry, be it “classical” or “medieval”, “renaissance” or “romantic”. There are, naturally, self-professed exceptions, from Wordsworth⁷ to William Carlos Williams, but a poet such as Shelley - to whom Eliot felt strong antipathy - would certainly not view himself as “anti-classical”; in that he employs classical mythology in his work, it may be argued that he is just as much a classical poet as Eliot. Of course, the distinction partially lies in the choice and use of particular strands of myth, with the subversive Prometheus myth resonating most powerfully for Shelley and his contemporaries. And it is with such a view of classical myth in mind that Northrop Frye can claim that “romanticism”, “Protestantism” and “revolution” are significant features of what he calls “mythopoeic poetry”⁸. Frye’s terms are deliberately stated in direct opposition to Eliot’s own, stated above. As for mysticism, the anti-mythical Wordsworth is nevertheless the prime exponent of this in romantic poetry, just as the “classical” Eliot demonstrates a parallel interest, albeit in what are considered more orthodox varieties. Whether we understand myth and mysticism as religious, spiritual or cultural terms, their importance and applicability to both classicism and romanticism is not really in question. As I have said, Eliot

Poetry is not a turning loose of emotion, but an escape from emotion; it is not the expression of personality, but an escape from personality” (*SE*, p.21).

⁶ see Aidan Day, *Romanticism* (London: Routledge, 1996), pp.79-125 (pp.83-84).

⁷ Wordsworth was not anti-myth in principle, feeling that in its simplest forms it could be effectively allied with sentiment, but tended to avoid it on the grounds that its use by poets had become “hackneyed and lifeless”; see M. H. Abrams, *The Mirror and the Lamp: Romantic Theory and the Critical Tradition* (London, Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1953), pp. 290-97.

⁸ *On Culture and Literature: A Collection of Review Essays*, ed. Robert D. Denham (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1978), (introduction) pp.5-6.

later abandoned his strict insistence on distinguishing between the latter two strands, but the impulse to do just this informs his earlier poetry, up to and including *The Waste Land*, so there is still an important question with respect to this: as far as Eliot is concerned, in what significant ways do romantic treatments of myth and mysticism differ from classical ones - and why does this matter?

2.2. March Hare.

In order to get to grips with the problem, it may be useful, in the first place, to talk of “myth” and “mysticism” in terms used by Jessie L. Weston in *From Ritual to Romance* (1920), a book Eliot was to read, and be strongly affected by, some years into his poetic development⁹. Discussing ritual, Weston recalls that the ancient rites of most pre-Christian religions tended to be viewed as possessing a two-fold character:

exoteric; in celebrations openly and publicly performed, in which all adherents of a cult could join freely, the object of such public rites being to obtain some external and material benefit, whether for the individual worshipper, or for the community as a whole — *esoteric*; rites open only to the favoured few, the initiates, the object of which appears, as a rule, to have been individual rather than social, and non-material. In some cases, certainly, the object aimed at was the attainment of a conscious, ecstatic, union with the god, and the definite assurance of a future life. In other words there was the public worship, and there were the Mysteries. (Weston, p.140)

Exoteric and esoteric; public and private; this is one of the chief distinctions I will be using in order to try to elucidate the mythical framework, style and technique in the early poetry. The texts describe public (social) rituals while enacting, in their formal techniques, underlying and even antagonistic private rituals of an opposing ideology. How such a distinction relates to the classical/romantic problem is best explained with reference to some of the earliest works.

Inventions of the March Hare is a notebook of poems and fragments from the years 1909-1917; that is to say, pieces written both prior to and contemporaneously with the poems that were published in *Prufrack and Other Observations*. The title

⁹ *From Ritual to Romance*, with a foreword by Robert A. Segal (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1993).

itself gives subtle clues as to the book's themes. The "madness" of March hares is, biologically speaking, a symptom of the mating season, and there are a number of poems dealing with courtship *au* "Prufrock", in the form of tea parties (perhaps with Lewis Carroll's Hare in mind¹⁰), group outings, and trips to the theatre - exoteric social rituals. At the same time, the hare has been traditionally characterised as a sad and solitary creature, "one of the most melancholicke beasts that is", tending to go about at night rather than in the day, "never feeding near home, either because they woulde exercise their legs in going, or else by secret instinct of nature, to conceale their forms and lodging places vnknowne [sic]" ¹¹ - not a bad description of the kind of characters who conduct vigils and solitary nocturnal journeys through the city - again, in the manner of "Prufrock" - in other poems from *Inventions*. The hare, then, is an emblem both of the social and of the solitary state, and his madness a symptom of either, or both.

2.3. Marionettes.

The opening poem is "Convictions (Curtain Raiser)" (*IOTMH*, p.11), dating from January 1910. It serves as a kind of prologue or "argument" for the collection, one spoken very much from a single, rather than chorus-type, viewpoint.

Among my marionettes I find
The enthusiasm is intense!
They see the outlines of their stage
Conceived upon a scale immense
And even in this later age
Await an audience open-mouthed
At climax and suspense.

Two, in a garden scene
Go picking tissue paper roses;
Hero and heroine, alone,
The monotone
Of promises and compliments
And guesses and supposes.

And over there my Paladins
Are talking of effect and cause,

¹⁰ Ricks (*IOTMH*, p.6n) argues for this.

¹¹ Turberville, *Noble Art of Venerie* (1611), and Topsell, *History* (1607-8), quoted by John Russell Brown in his edition of John Webster's *The White Devil* (Welwyn Garden City: Broadwater Press, 1960), p.88n.

With "learn to live by nature's laws!"
 And "strive for social happiness
 And contact with your fellow-men
 In Reason: nothing to excess"
 As one leaves off the next begins.

And one, a lady with a fan
 Cries to her waiting-maid discreet
 "Where shall I ever find the man!
 One who appreciates my soul;
 I'd throw my heart beneath his feet.
 I'd give my life to his control."
 (With more that I shall not repeat.)

My marionettes (or so they say)
 Have these keen moments every day.

The tone is somewhat Laforguean, and another Eliot poem describing a marionette figure, "Humoresque", is subtitled "(AFTER J. LAFORGUE)"¹² because of an echo of Laforgue in the opening line, "One of my marionettes is dead". Laforgue's line, however, refers not to marionette but to a pierrot - "Encore un de mes pierrots mort;"¹³ - a clown figure associated particularly with the moon and madness¹⁴, and a recurrent figure in the French poet's work. A pierrot can be a marionette or a doll, but can also be a human or a fairy-tale creature, so Eliot's specific use of "marionette" in "Humoresque" appears to limit the figure to a mechanical subject rather than anything more human. "Convictions" examines this mechanical quality more fully, drawing together what might be considered the marionette's romantic and classical connotations.

As Ricks points out, the marionette is a common figure in German romantic literature (*IOTMH*, p.103n), the one in E. T. A. Hoffmann's "Sandman" being a well-known example¹⁵. The perfect mechanical beauty and naturalness of the marionette provokes disquiet for the romantic mind, seeming as it does to question by corollary the naturalness and self-will of "real" humans, especially those humans it deceives. In

¹² *Poems written in Early Youth (PWIEY)* (London: Faber and Faber, 1967), pp.30-31 (p.30).

¹³ "Locutions des Pierrots" XII, 1.5, *Poems of Jules Laforgue*, transl. Peter Dale (London: Anvil, 1986), p.221.

¹⁴ See, for instance, *The Pierrot of the Minute* in *The Poems of Ernest Dowson*, with a memoir by Arthur Symons (London: Bodley Head, 1911), pp.81-116.

¹⁵ From *Nachstücke* (1816), in E. T. A. Hoffmann, *Tales of Hoffmann*, selected and translated with introduction by R. J. Hollingdale (London: Penguin, 1982), pp. 85-125.

the later Nineteenth Century, Wilde's use of the marionette figure retains the sinister romantic associations while twisting the wondrous verisimilitude of Hoffmann's doll into an even more grotesque equation of human and machine. In the poem "The Harlot's House" (which I suggested earlier is Eliot *avant la lettre*), characters are initially "like" "wire-pulled automatons", and are henceforth treated *as* actual puppets, so that the narrator can later register his horror and amazement when

Sometimes a horrible marionette
Came out and smoked its cigarette
Upon the steps like a live thing.¹⁶

A neat and vivid reversal, but despite the rhetorical balancing act, the underlying assertion of the poem is predominantly of the subhuman nature of human beings, rather than of the human quality of marionettes; at least in "The Sandman" this latter aspect is an important and mysterious one.

Wilde picks up his theme again in *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, in Lord Henry's reflections on ageing: "We degenerate into hideous puppets, haunted by the memory of passions of which we were too much afraid, and the exquisite temptations that we had not the courage to yield to" (*PODG*, p.28). He does not say what we become the puppets *of* - presumably social convention and expectation. Overall, then, Wilde seems to be using the puppet/marionette image to represent those who have stopped living according to their passion; it is at best grotesque, at worst simply dull. This second quote is strikingly suggestive of lines in Part V of *The Waste Land*¹⁷ - indeed one can find numerous echoes of Wilde's novel in Eliot's poetry - but although Eliot may be seen to follow "The Harlot's House" in interchanging human and marionette as a satirical strategy - lines 6-7 are ambiguous as to whether it is the marionettes or the audience who are dumbly open-mouthed; probably both - "Convictions" seems to suggest that Lord Henry's passions and exquisite temptations are themselves part of the problem.

¹⁶ "The Harlot's House", ll.22-24, *The Complete Works of Oscar Wilde* (London and Glasgow: Collins, 1966), pp.789-90 (p.789).

¹⁷ "My friend, blood shaking my heart / The awful daring of a moment's surrender / Which an age of prudence can never retract / By this, and this only, we have existed", *TWL*, ll.402-05, *ECP*, p.78.

One way of reading the poem is as a criticism of what Eliot viewed as related false ideologies of the Nineteenth Century: romanticism, evolutionary science and anglo-saxon philosophy. The third stanza, for instance, mocks determinism of the logical and biological varieties, as well as Utilitarianism: the sense of “learn to live by nature’s laws!” is at the very least questionable - for such a philosophy to be true, one would have already to be automatically acting according those preordained laws, and therefore one is not really learning to do so at all. It is not explained which laws of nature are in mind - “survival of the fittest”? - and whether they are compatible with the striving for social happiness urged by the second “Paladin”, but this is quite irrelevant: the narrator’s aim is to depict speakers as mechanical as the theories they espouse, regardless of the individual relations between those theories.

One could argue that in this stanza at least, Eliot is in perfect agreement with Lord Henry, and that the problem does indeed lie with a lack of passion. The “Paladins” (Eliot uses this term in his criticism to refer to anglo-saxon scientific philosophers of religion¹⁸) could be viewed just as a comic interlude in an otherwise emotionally heightened series of scenes. But a closer inspection of the first stanza may suggest a rather different relationship. The terms “outlines of their stage” and “later age” could be taken to indicate a view of history and human progress related not simply to Enlightenment rationalism but also to theories of biological evolution and its numerous stages. Such a “scale immense” merely dwarves further these dwarfish figures¹⁹. Even in this later age, the dull biological imperatives of birth and copulation and death (“conceived”, “climax”, “suspense”,²⁰) underlie what has appeared to be spontaneous, mysterious and magical. But why should the narrator play Dr. Cabanis here, calling upon rationalism to puncture innocent melodrama? The

¹⁸ Ricks, *IOTMH*, p.165n; “Thoughts After Lambeth” (1931), *SE*, p.371.

¹⁹ Nor is such a “scale immense” itself necessarily considered impressive. Criticising the humanism of I. A. Richards in 1933, Eliot analysed a number of points which Richards had offered as touchstones for the contemplation of human existence; number three was “The inconceivable immensity of the Universe”, to which Eliot responded: “It was not, we remember, the ‘immense spaces’ themselves, but their eternal silence that terrified Pascal. With a definite religious background this is intelligible. But the effect of popular astronomy books (like Sir James Jeans’s) upon me is only of the insignificance of vast space”. “The Modern Mind”, in *UOP*, pp.121-42 (p.133).

²⁰ Eliot makes a similar play upon the word “climax” in “Nocturne” (*PWIEY*, p.29), where a narrator stage-manages the murder of the hero of Romeo and Juliet in order to bring to an end the “usual debate” of a serial romance. He assures us that this is the “climax” that “female readers” and “all true lovers seek”.

implication is that the two opposite tendencies are mutually bound; just as Muriel Spark has suggested, with regard to *Frankenstein*, that the more rigid the system of logic, the more fervent the imaginative response ²¹, so, here, a late-romantic society which subscribes to extreme rationalist philosophies of science and society experiences the contrasting desire to live according to extreme sentimental behavioural impulses.

That the modern marionette's problem may be as much one of excess passion as of excess automatism, is the argument similarly put forward, not long before Eliot wrote "Convictions", in Edward Gordon Craig's essay "The Actor and the *Über-marionette*" (1907) ²². He argues that the modern marionette, "today in his least happy period", is more than the "rather superior doll" he might seem, being in fact "a descendant of the stone images of the old temples - he is today a rather degenerate form of god" (E. Craig, p.153). Despite their decline, he asserts their continuing relevance:

even modern puppets are extraordinary things. The applause may thunder or dribble, their hearts beat no faster, no slower, their signals do not grow hurried or confused; and though drenched in a torrent of bouquets and love, the face of the leading lady remains as solemn, as beautiful and remote as ever. There is something more than a flash of genius in the marionette, and there is something in him more than the flashiness of displayed personality. The marionette appears to me to be the last echo of some noble and beautiful art of a past civilisation. But as with all art which has passed into fat or vulgar hands, the puppet has become a reproach. All puppets are now but low comedians.

They imitate the comedians of the larger and fuller blooded stage. They enter only to fall on their back. They drink only to reel, and make love only to raise a laugh. They have forgotten the counsel of their mother the Sphinx. Their bodies have lost grave grace, they have become stiff. Their eyes have lost that infinite subtlety of seeming to see; now they only stare. They display and jingle their nerves and are cock-sure in their wooden wisdom. They have failed to remember that their art should carry on it the same stamp of reserve that we see at times on the work of other artists, and that the highest art is that which conceals the craft and forgets the craftsman. (E. Craig, p.154)

²¹ *Mary Shelley* (New York: Dutton, 1987), p.167.

²² Published in *The Mask* (1909), repr. in *Modernism: An Anthology of Sources and Documents*, ed. Vassiliki Kolocotroni, Jane Goldman and Olga Taxidou (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1998), pp.150-54.

The second paragraph would serve very well as a description of the marionettes in “Convictions”. Craig’s essay is actually about human actors rather than marionettes; he wishes for the former to learn how not to be at the mercy of their own emotions (E. Craig, p.151); it is a profoundly anti-realist idea of drama. The “Über-marionette” he refers to is to be the ideal human actor that results from imitating the marionette. It becomes quite clear that Craig is not attacking automatism *per se*, indeed he wishes acting to be a particularly elevated form of this: “Its ideal will not be the flesh and blood but rather the body in trance - it will aim to clothe itself with a death-like beauty while exhaling a living spirit”. In such a way it will possess “the mysterious joyousness which is in all passionless works of art” (E. Craig, p.154).

In his conclusion, Craig expresses his hope that the Über-marionette in the theatre will enable “the people to return to their ancient joy in ceremonies - once more will Creation be celebrated - homage rendered to existence - and divine and happy intercession made to Death” (E. Craig, p.154). For Craig, then, automatism lies at the heart of bringing theatre back to a state of ritual; the contemporary marionette has “forgotten” this, and lowered its status by succumbing to cheap sensation and passion. Eliot’s stance in “Convictions” appears to be similar, except that he particularly plays upon the additional possible inference, namely that the modern marionette (meaning: human being,) has not simply dispensed with ritual, but instead enacts its own rituals of cheap sensation and passion, rituals which additionally unconsciously allude to the much older kind that Craig has in mind.

The second stanza, for instance, introduces a flower garden scene, which in Eliot’s later work is to be invested with humanity and seriousness, but which is here rendered cheap and lifeless by the tissue paper roses²³ and the monotonous conversation - the equivalent scenes in “La Figlia Che Piange” and *The Waste Land* are invested with poignancy by being silent (*ECP*, pp.36, 64.). The rose garden scene has its generic roots in medieval literature, as does the word “Paladin” in the next stanza, deriving from the title “Count Palatine”, a famous warrior in the Charlemagne romances, being extended to mean more generally a knightly hero or knight errant (*OED*). In “Convictions” the Paladins are on a (rather confused) quest for utilitarian

²³ See also “Rhapsody on Windy Night” (Chapter Three).

rather than mystical truths. And just as the figure of the male knight errant has been rendered banal in the third stanza, in the fourth he is displaced altogether, as the lady with the fan takes on the conventional behaviour of the chivalric knight: a knight throwing his heart (metaphorically) at a lady's feet was considered to suggest nobility and purity - for a woman to throw hers at (- *beneath!*-) a man's feet suggests, we are to infer, hysteria and an unpleasantly self-assertive form of self-abasement. In fact, "beneath his feet", as opposed to the more usual "at his feet", both intensifies the figure of speech in accordance with the violent emotion of the woman, and at the same time calls to mind an additional chivalric image - of the little dogs oddly positioned beneath the feet of the recumbent knight on the carved medieval tombs to be found in many churches. Whether the woman aspires to the role of chivalric hero or faithful spaniel, the chivalric *male* hero is absent from Eliot's poem.

In this way, "Convictions" appears to be pitting medieval romance against Eliot's version of romanticism, preserving the first only in a parodic ritual re-enactment. Frye defines ritual as "a recurrent act of symbolic communication"²⁴, and the marionettes "(or so they say) / Have these keen moments every day"; they have a sense of some symbolic meaning to their actions, but cannot identify the symbols, or perhaps, suspects the narrator, they falsely interpret them. Frye locates ritual within "the central recurrent cycle of sleeping and waking life, the daily frustration of the ego, the nightly awakening of a titanic self" (Frye, p.105). While we can certainly see "daily frustration" in the lot of these puppets, the "titanic self" appears to be absent, unless it be there in the form of the ironic puppet-master. For Frye, it is the intervention of dream (that is, a "nightly awakening") that gives insight into the ritual of daily life, an awareness suggested at by characters elsewhere in Eliot's poetry²⁵, but absent from the marionettes.

This is partly emphasised by the very public nature of their "private" moments. In addition to the larger audience, the couple in the rose garden have each

²⁴ "Ethical Criticism: Theory of Symbols", in *Anatomy of Criticism: Four Essays* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1957), pp.71-128 (p.105).

²⁵ For example, "Only at midnight, aethereal rumours / Revive for a moment a broken Coriolanus" in *The Waste Land* (ECP, p.79), also "Sometimes these cogitations still amaze / The troubled midnight and the noon's repose" in "La Figlia Che Piange" (ECP, p.36; see also Chapter Four); see also Chapter Three, on "Rhapsody on a Windy night".

other as audience, and the lady has her “waiting maid discreet”. There is simply no space or moment for private insight. Only the narrator is an authentically solitary and private character, and the title “Convictions” suggests a desire to make a sincere statement of beliefs or principles. But here, as elsewhere in much of the early poetry, that fails to materialise in any explicit way; instead, the characters are “convicted” for their own beliefs. The narrator detaches himself from his own poem and his own creatures, disclaiming its contents - “My marionettes (or so they *say*)” - in a closing couplet detached from the normal run of stanzas.

Yet there seems to be a purpose to the main body of the poem, in that the marionettes are attempting, however crudely, to locate meaning in the ritual of everyday life. The problem for such characters in Eliot’s poetry seems to be one of false-consciousness - they seek original, personal meaning, but according to a set of clichéd cultural notions, so that what they locate beneath their romantic surface is often merely another romantic surface. The most notable exposure of such a process may be found in “Portrait of a Lady”, where, amongst other things, the lady’s poetic soul is guilty of plagiarism: her “buried life” is *not* “somehow” recalled by “these April sunsets”(ECP, p.20), but rather by Matthew Arnold’s poem; nor, when she emotes, ““How much it means that I say this to you - / Without these friendships - life, what *cauchemar!*””(ECP, p.19) can we be expected to think it means that much, since those are Byron’s words, not hers²⁶. This is Eliot’s revenge on the individualist associationism of late romanticism - the lady would not wish the allusions to be recognised (indeed wishes they were not allusions at all, that they were her own); the poet certainly does wish them to be recognised. As Angus Calder observes, “Eliot objected to Romanticism that it concentrated on free imagination at the expense of memory, and elevated merely personal memory [...] Poetry for Eliot involves above all the memory of *art*”²⁷. Eliot attacks the romantic idea of the independent individual imagination; thus the implication of self-deceit in “Portrait”, where the romantic lady

²⁶ Arnold, “The Buried Life”, in *The Poems of Matthew Arnold*, ed. Kenneth Allott (London: Longman’s, Green and Co, 1965), pp.271-75; ll.47-48: “There rises an unspeakable desire / After the knowledge of our buried life”; I have been unable to place the Byron quote.

²⁷ T. S. Eliot (Brighton: Harvester, 1987), p.96.

- with an imagination that is certainly fertile but hardly free - does, of course, make art memory stand in for - and even presents it *as* - her own personal memory.

These kinds of re-enactment, then, be they verbal or physical, conscious or unconscious, may be understood as fulfilling Frye's definition of ritual as symbolic communication. And we may additionally, now, see the helpfulness of using Weston's distinctions between exoteric and esoteric ritual, with the following qualifications to their meaning. Firstly, when Weston refers to exoteric rituals, she means public religious rituals, of a certain level of significance, which are understood as just that - public religious rituals. In Eliot's poetry, exoteric rituals tend to fall into two camps: on the one hand, those activities which are viewed as social rituals of worth (tea parties, visits to museum or opera, even church-going itself) and which are yet often mocked as inadequate substitutes for something not yet made clear; and on the other hand, those activities of everyday life which are less obviously conscious than social events, but which may also unintentionally evoke ideas of ritual and mystery, seriously or parodically, in the minds of Eliot's narrators. Secondly, then, regarding the esoteric, this lies in the overall construction of the poems and in the linguistic and literary ambivalences of the narrators' speech. Among some of the earliest poems, including "Convictions", no alternative meaning, idea or myth is suggested with real strength, unless one is understanding esoteric meanings as being something the poet wishes almost to withhold even from his readers - in Chapter Five, I will suggest this is actually the case in *The Waste Land*. In fact, mythic patterns become detectable fairly early on under the surface of the work, but initially the "classical convictions" are stated more in the form of attacks on notions of romanticism. The allusions to medieval ritual considered above hint at esoteric ritual, but the larger detachment and cynicism of the poem speak more of a desire for esoteric meaning than of its actual possession.

2.4. Goldfish and Peacocks.

"Goldfish (Essence of Summer Magazines)" (1910) is a four-part poem describing social rituals - a dance, a picnic outing and a tea party - in which mythical themes intrude a little more noticeably. The second part, "Embarquement pour

Cythère” (“Embarkation for Venus”) (*IOTMH*, p.27), fancifully describes the prelude to a journey into outer space: “Ladies, the moon is on its way! / Is everybody here? / And the sandwiches and ginger beer?”. Venus herself is presented in the guise of the “evening star” where the voyagers may light their cigarettes, and is also described as a “porcelain land, what avatar / Where blue-delft-romance is the law.” The Venus of myth is thus reduced by a triple characterisation: firstly, as a reachable object in space; secondly, as a mere cigarette lighter; and thirdly, as a place that merely embodies other (earthly) embodiments of romantic style. The key word here is “avatar”, which derives from Hindu myth and means, strictly, “the descent of a deity to earth in an incarnate form”, but which more generally can mean a “manifestation” or simply a “phase” (*OED*). The imagined Vernean journey up into space has the reverse effect of suggesting a “descent” to earth by the deity, respectively in terms of spatial motion, of historical progress (from the goddess herself to porcelain depictions of her), and of diminution of ritual significance (being used to light cigarettes rather than bridal lamps²⁸). No physical journey is made, nor need be, because the heavenly body of love is brought to earth with a bump by the earthly romantic terms in which it is conceived. That which is signified becomes prey to its signifiers.

This shrinking of mythical or mystical significance continues in Part III with a tea ritual, “White flannel ceremonial / With cakes and tea / And guesses at eternal truths / Sounding the depths with a silver spoon” (*IOTMH*, p.28). The depths are shallow, the eternal truths social chatter. In the final part of the poem (*IOTMH*, pp.29-30), the narrator finds a poem among the “débris” of a bureau drawer. The poem describes another voyage, this time a nautical one, in which a narrator searches “the aged sibyl” in the eyes of a second character for answers to “some minor problems of the soul”. The mystic moment of revelation passes as the “oracle” replies “These problems seem importunate / But after all do not exist.” The poem ends with a note of questioning this banality, followed by yet another banal diminution:

Between the theoretic seas

²⁸ John Milton, *Paradise Lost* VIII, ll.518-20, “the amorous bird of night / Sung spousal, and bid haste the evening star / On his hill top, to light the bridal lamp”; *Paradise Lost*, ed. Alistair Fowler (London: Longman, 1981). (Ricks also notes this possible allusion (*IOTMH*, p.152n)). The symbol of permanent fidelity is mocked by the image of this transient instrument of social intercourse.

And your assuring certainties
 I have my fears:
 I am off for some Hesperides
 Of street pianos and small beers!

Here, the other name for the evening star, “Hesperus”, is evoked; the Hesperides were mythical lands in the west, to which Hercules journeyed. Present female company is passed up in favour of an idea of escapist adventure, amounting in this instance merely to a trip to the pub. As a whole, “Goldfish” - these marionettes do not “do”, so much as gawp - traces the failed attempts at romance that punctuate social events over a period of a few summer months. The title itself, as well as the various parts, locate the narrator in a context of a female society which is depicted as claustrophobic and trivial. Smallness prevails, and attempts to muse beyond the confines of respectable society life are doomed. Myth is present only as a potted version of Venus, goddess of “romance”, and the journey to Venus spoilt, for the narrator, by the presence of actual women. The “fears” that lie between “theoretic seas” and “assuring certainties” are unarticulated in “Goldfish”, passed off by a tone of facetiousness, but in a poem of two years earlier, “Circe’s Palace”, a clearer indication of their nature is suggested, in an explicitly mythical context:

Around her fountain which flows
 With the voices of men in pain,
 Are flowers that no man knows.
 Their petals are fanged and red
 With hideous streak and stain;
 They sprang from the limbs of the dead. —
 We shall not come here again.

Panthers rise from their lairs
 In the forest which thickens below,
 Along the garden stairs
 The sluggish python lies;
 The peacocks walk, stately and slow,
 And they look at us with the eyes
 Of men whom we knew long ago.

(PWIEY, p.26)

The poem has not received much critical attention until fairly recently, for several reasons. Firstly, its publication in *Poems Written in Early Youth* has given it the tag of juvenilia, although in view of the large amount of material dating from shortly

afterwards which has only come to publication recently (in *Inventions of the March Hare*), the fact that Eliot must have considered it worthy of public presentation above these other “juvenilia” is worth pondering. Secondly, its historical setting being far removed from the twentieth-century world of the poems of the *Prufrock* volume might suggest that it is just an apprentice piece, overly influenced by the likes of Swinburne²⁹. And finally, it has been located in another sense as being too contemporary, supposed to be a thinly disguised satire of a middle-aged Boston society lady, to whose tea parties Eliot and Harvard friends like Conrad Aiken found themselves invited³⁰. F. B. Pinion delivers the typical verdict, “‘Circe’s Palace’, ostensibly serious, derived from and set seal to, a college joke”³¹.

The biographical genesis of the poem may be as claimed, and the joke may be laughed or tutted at accordingly, but the poem as it stands is no mere piece of trivia, despite the droll aside that closes the first stanza. Lyndall Gordon traces this Circe to the stereotype of “dangerous, perverse or abnormal” women found in Poe and Hawthorne, such as Madeleine Usher and Beatrice Rappaccini (Gordon, p.25). While I am not so sure about the former, the heroine of “Rappaccini’s Daughter” does offer a close analogue, and Eliot may have taken his title from Hawthorne’s own “Circe’s Palace”, a children’s story³². The first stanza could serve as quite an accurate poetic rendering of the setting of “Rappaccini’s Daughter”. What that story emphasises, though, is that Beatrice is no straightforward villain or deliberate femme fatale - she has been made poisonous to “normal” people, but equally, what is normal to the outside world is poisonous to her, and the attempt to reconcile this incompatibility leads to her own death as well as that of her lover, Giovanni. Left in her isolated

²⁹ Cf. “The Garden of Proserpine”: “Pale beds of blowing rushes / Where no leaf blooms or blushes / Save this whereat she crushes / For dead men deadly wine”; “Laus Veneris”: “Her little chambers drip with flower-like red, / Her girdles and the chaplet of her head, / Her armlets and her anklets; with her feet / She tramples all the winepress of the dead”; “Her beds are full of perfume and sad sound, / Her doors are made with music, and barred round / With sighing and with laughter and with tears, / With tears whereby strong souls of men are bound”; Algernon Charles Swinburne, *Poems and Ballads* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1883), p.194; p.18.

³⁰ Lyndall Gordon, *Eliot’s Early Years*, (Oxford and London: University of Oxford Press, 1977), p.26.

³¹ F. B. Pinion, *A T. S. Eliot Companion: Life and Works* (London: Macmillan, 1986), p.64.

³² “Rappaccini’s Daughter” and “Circe’s Palace”, in Nathaniel Hawthorne, *Hawthorne Centenary Edition, Vol. VII: Tales and Sketches*, (Ohio: Ohio University Press, 1972), pp.975-1005, 265-95. The latter story is quite a comical rendition.

garden, she would have offered no threat and been herself unthreatened. Paul Murphy has linked Eliot's Circe with his Saint Narcissus, and suggests that they are correlatives and complementary³³. Just as Narcissus is a masochist, so he requires the "sadist" Circe:

The two figures almost offer the possibility of forcing a hermaphroditic whole, demanding the taste of blood, or the taste of semen, demanding the life-blood of the other, or gaining the inexplicable pain and ecstasy of the climax attained through martyrdom. (Murphy, p.30)

I shall be considering the case of Saint Narcissus and sado-masochism, along with the related character of Saint Sebastian, in Chapter Four, but Murphy's point about the hermaphroditic can be borne out simply on the evidence in "Circe's Palace".

The first stanza may be characterised as female-dominated, in the form of the fountain and flowers, and the second as focusing upon the male, in the form of the panthers, pythons and peacocks. The absent Circe is represented by the contradictory images of the flowing fountain and "fanged" petals: the former an upright phallic image ("fountain") which is nevertheless materially flaccid ("flowing"), and articulating not a female voice of action or pleasure, but "the voices of men in pain"; the latter an image that combines the carnivorous and the herbivorous, the medieval sexual image of the female *hortus enclosus* (closed garden) here opening up into a *vagina dentata*. These images are contradictory, but the contradictions are combined powerfully. Circe's realm takes on both male and female potency.

The second stanza, by contrast, suggests three kinds of emasculation. The panthers that "rise" from their lairs suggest not so much phallic power as an action of fearfully disengaging themselves from the female "forest". (Note how the words one may associate with the male in the poem tend to start with the letter "p" - pain, panthers, python, peacocks - while the female is signified by the letter "f" - fountain, flows, flowers, fanged, forest³⁴.) The sluggish python hardly requires elucidation, and

³³ P. Murphy, "The Dream Interpretation and the Dark Continent of Femininity: 'Circe's Palace' and 'On a Portrait'", *Essays in Poetics*, 19: 2 (1994), 25-33, p.30

³⁴ Although, according to this system of classification, "Petals" and "fanged" might seem incorrectly gendered as male and female respectively, they are in any case in this poem mixed into the same image, an image of gender reversal. As for "Palace", the irony is that, just as Circe is not present, nor

seems to be presented as the opposite of the vigorous fountain. Finally, the poem closes with a curious twist on the traditional Circe story, where the enchantress turns men into particular beasts according to their vices. (Thus, Odysseus's men are transformed into pigs, and others have become wolves and tigers.) In Eliot's poem we find panthers and a python, as well as peacocks, this last example providing an interesting alteration to the myth. Here, the transformation is not simply into "base" animals, but into a type of creature celebrated, unusually, for the superiority of beauty of the male over the female of the species. This objectification, this casting of the male in the "female" role, surprising in a poem ostensibly predicated on literary stereotypes of the femme fatale, reminds us that nowhere in the poem is Circe herself described. Invisible or absent, the female exercises uncharacteristic power of the gaze over the male. And this reversal of traditional viewpoints is emphasised by the unsettling uncertainty as to whether it is the eyes in the peacocks' heads, or the decorative multitude of blind "eyes" on their feathers, that look forlornly at the voyagers. If the latter is the case, then the men have suffered not only transformation into objects to be looked at, but have also been further deprived of their individuality in that the souls of a number of them have been made to occupy each animal. The blindness that accompanies such beauty foreshadows the alarming transformation of men's eyes into pearls in *The Waste Land* (ECP, pp.66-67). The objectification of what are themselves usually instruments of objectification, could be understood as a form of symbolic castration. "Circe's Palace" demonstrates one of the values of myth for Eliot - not only as a pattern to underlie a narrative or situation, but also as a pattern to be significantly departed *from* or rearranged *into*.

In reading "Circe's Palace" as a presentation of a sado-masochistic relationship between male and female, Murphy suggests that the misogyny that seems to be present in Eliot's early poetry might be understood as "a reaction against the idea of sexual division", and that a fear of the opposite sex is nevertheless accompanied by a desire to reconcile masculinity and femininity (Murphy, p.31). I will argue along such lines in my final chapter. In the case of this particular poem, we have found a treatment of myth which is neither simply stereotypical nor solely a

is any edifice. This is a description of Circe's *garden*, of the re-encroachment of "female" nature upon "male" civilisation.

joke. What it does seem to indicate is that myth, which “Convictions” and “Goldfish” seem to gesture towards as a means of escape, may also reveal itself as a source of uncertainty.

2.5. Observations and observances: “Prufrock” and ritual.

The poems I have referred to so far, dating from 1908 to 1910, present problems for classical convictions, both in the form of modern, late-romantic society as subject matter and in the potential use of explicit classical myth as a symbolic mode. The common feature is a perceived threat of feminine dominance. In what appears to be a response to this, from 1911 onwards there are poems which take as their subject lone male “flâneur”³⁵ figures, out on evening walks or holding all-night vigils. “The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock” is one of the earliest of these attempts to make space and sense in the world for the male narrator, an attempt which articulates powerfully the competing claims of the exoteric and the esoteric, the social and the private.

To look for a mythic significance in “Prufrock”, whose action appears simply to describe the awkward social visit of a middle-aged man to a hostess who seems forever beyond his reach, may seem unnecessary. Grover Smith, who will follow doggedly the grail-myth line on *The Waste Land*, on this occasion passes up the opportunity:

it might be instructive to read [“Prufrock”] as a parallel to the [grail] legend, putting the etiolated sentimentalist alongside of the quester who fails to ask the liberating question, the sea-girls alongside of the water-maiden bearing the life-symbol, the platter-borne head of John the Baptist alongside the Grail itself. (In the “Peredur” of *The Mabinogion*, the Grail talisman is in fact a man’s bleeding head carried on a charger.) Eliot, on the other hand, had found his lonely and dejected hero long before considering the applicability of the myth.³⁶

This is a large assumption to make with regard to Eliot’s awareness of Grail myth, but in any case, if the poem’s underlying concern is not specifically *mythic*, then in

³⁵ flâneur: “a lounge or saunterer, an idle man about town” (*OED*). This is not unlike the “dandy” figure outlined below (Prufrock is both dandy and flâneur).

³⁶ *T. S. Eliot’s Poetry and Plays: A Study in Sources* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1956), pp.5-6.



Smith's view it is at least *mystic*, namely "the idealist's quest for union with the vision forever elusive in this world" (Smith, p.6). Indeed, Lachlan Mackinnon has argued that it is the idea of the mystical quest in the modern world that lies at the heart of the construction of the dandy figure, of whom Prufrock is an example, from Baudelaire onwards³⁷.

Mackinnon identifies Baudelaire's dandyism as having its roots in the fall in status of authors in the sixty or so years after the French Revolution, a fall precipitated by the loss of aristocratic patronage, the rise of an egalitarian bourgeoisie, and the growth of the newspaper. The individual author leads an increasingly impoverished and precarious existence in a new context where the disposability of the printed word is pitched, as a virtue, against the idea of the durable art work. The writer, particularly the poet, becomes an isolated and nostalgic figure who recalls the ideas of an aristocratic age (MacKinnon, pp.7-9). Baudelaire's response is a dandyism which is not of the older, social variety, but rather a moral one in which fastidious dress and behaviour, the extreme care paid to the conventions of the time, is intended conversely to emphasise the dandy's distinction and separateness from his society: "The poet preserves niceties of attire because they have a symbolic function. His care for his appearance is an index to his unique ability to perceive significance in the world of sense-data" (MacKinnon, p.11).

The dandy's attitude to his environment, then, is an obsessive concern with the surfaces of the "real" world, accompanied by a parallel obsession with what might lie underneath these surfaces. The dandy's most characteristic activity, however, the stroll through the streets to identify their hidden meanings, is one marked with the awareness that the personal values and associative connections he ascribes to this world from which he feels detached, are merely that - personal, "which is why he must shape his life as a quest, insisting that there is a true destination" (MacKinnon, p.18). The endless walk becomes an end in itself, because it keeps alive the possibility of finding meaning behind surfaces, at the same time as maintaining a necessary distance from those surfaces by always moving on.

³⁷ Eliot, Auden, Lowell: *Aspects of the Baudelaireian Inheritance* (London: Macmillan, 1983).

It is thus that MacKinnon traces Eliot's appropriation of the dandy/flâneur, both in his life and in his poetry, back to the serious Baudelaire rather than the "shallow" Laforgue: "The precision of his style, a characteristic of Eliot's work, is a care for appearance which is the literary equivalent of sartorial dandyism. Style for Eliot, like clothes for Baudelaire, gestures towards the poet's inner perfection" (MacKinnon, p.24).

In contrast with his creator, Prufrock himself is seen by MacKinnon as a failed dandy - it is not his fastidious impulses themselves which invite ridicule, but his inability to pursue them to their purest extreme:

Prufrock is initially a *flâneur*, walking the streets, but he rejects the poetry of the city. When the streets seem 'To lead you to an overwhelming question', he says

Oh do not ask, 'What is it?'
Let us go and make our visit.

Prufrock retreats into the sociable, his sense of time so attenuated that there is time to 'prepare' a mask for social occasions. The decision is not really a decision: Prufrock rests in his inauthenticity.

(MacKinnon, p.28)

So, we can view the walk through the streets as embodying contradictory dynamics: that is, the facilitation both of arriving at the woman's drawing room, and of *never* arriving. To arrive not only entails the slipping into a shallow social dandyism but also, in this instance, of coming within the sphere of the female, an element which MacKinnon sees as inherently abhorrent to the Baudelairean and Eliotic dandy: "Woman is tied to her menstruating, defecating flesh in a way which appals the dandy in his frigid perfection. She threatens to involve him in the cyclical process of generation" (MacKinnon, p.25). One is tempted to suggest that, in this instance, Prufrock should be so lucky - the female protagonist in this poem is quite different from the clinging equivalent in "Portrait of a Lady" - and instead of viewing Prufrock's failure as consisting in a faulty choice of social over mystical dandyism, it may be more accurate to see his problem as deriving from only a partial awareness of the nature and significance of either form of dandyism, so that he is uncertain as to whether his search is sexual or spiritual. Eliot endows J. Alfred Prufrock with a

greater self-consciousness than any of his other narrators, which is partly a self-consciousness of a *lack* of self-awareness; he is painfully aware that he is playing a role, but is not sure as to *which* role he should be playing. Indeed, his confusion is evinced by the very style of the language he uses, a style which is, peculiarly, a simultaneous demonstration and refusal of the precision which MacKinnon rightly views as central to Eliot's dandyism.

The form of Prufrock's monologue exhibits a tension between bizarre, pinpointed imagery and the rambling, conversational evasiveness it punctuates, thus offering us contrasting responses to the poem's common problem of fixing meaning to objects, people and events with any degree of certainty or fullness. The meandering and elliptical quality of his speech may call to mind Luce Irigaray's description of *écriture féminine*, feminine writing:

In her statements [...] woman retouches herself constantly. She just barely separates from herself some chatter, an exclamation, a half-secret, a sentence left in suspense - when she returns to it, it is only to set out again from another point [...] when she says something, it is already no longer identical to what she means. Moreover, her statements are never identical to anything. Their distinguishing feature is one of contiguity. They touch (upon). And when they wander too far from this nearness, she stops and begins again from 'zero'.³⁸

Irigaray presents this as a positive characteristic of the feminine voice. In "Prufrock", such a technique yields a roundabout, tactile, seductiveness:

The yellow fog that rubs its back upon the window-panes,
The yellow smoke that rubs its muzzle on the window-panes
Licked its tongue into the corners of the evening,
Lingered upon the pools that stand in drains,

(ECP, p.13)

Such pleasurable absorption in the formless, however, quickly turns into a sense of uncertainty ("time yet for a hundred indecisions, / And for a hundred visions and revisions,") (ECP, p.13), "And how should I begin?" (p.15)), and subsequently into suspicion ("And the afternoon, the evening, sleeps so peacefully! / Smoothed by long

³⁸"This Sex Which is Not One", transl. by Claudia Reeder, in *New French Feminisms: An Anthology*, ed. Elaine Marks and Isabelle de Courtivrons (Brighton: Harvester, 1981), pp.99-106 (p.103).

fingers, / Asleep ... tired ... or it malingers, / Stretched on the floor, here beside you and me”(p.15)), culminating in fearful frustration (“It is impossible to say just what I mean!” (p.16). The narrator’s quandary is that his circuitous linguistic approaches are meant to persuade the hypothetical woman in the poem, and yet they exemplify his own uncertainty as to just what it is that he feels or wants³⁹. All this is compounded by his fear that he will not understand the signals *she* might give in her own conversation, and that she may herself be perpetually revising her intentions: “That is not what I meant at all, / That is not it at all” (p.17), an ironic anticipation of Irigaray’s own rebuke to would-be Prufrocks:

It is therefore useless to trap women into giving an exact definition of what they mean, to make them repeat (themselves) so the meaning will be clear. They are already elsewhere in the discursive machinery where you claim to take them by surprise. They have turned back within themselves, which does not mean the same thing as ‘within yourself’. They do not experience the same interiority that you do and which perhaps you mistakenly assume they share. ‘Within themselves’, means in the privacy of the silent, multiple, diffuse tact. If you ask them insistently what they are thinking about, they can only reply: nothing. Everything. (“This Sex Which is Not One”, p.103)

Prufrock, then, both articulates himself in the mode of feminine discourse (as identified by Irigaray) and is also outside of it - in that he is unable to connect with another example of this discourse. As Marja Palmer puts it, “the male and female characters talk past each other, their secret wishes and longings being imperceptible to the other party. [...] The man is a guest and foreigner in this world of women: in fact he is quite impossible here”⁴⁰.

So far as a mythic subtext in the poem is concerned, Palmer suggests a link to the sea-born Venus (Anadyomene), perhaps born from an oyster-shell in this instance (Palmer, p.38), viewing the poem’s metaphysical concerns as, at base, erotic and concerned with male-female unity. While Stephen Spender takes up Grover Smith’s offered line on Prufrock as grail quester⁴¹, Lois Cuddy interprets “Prufrock” -

³⁹ Note, for instance, that she is “one”, not “she”; that is to say, it is not even certain that Prufrock has a particular woman in mind to propose to.

⁴⁰ *Men and Women in T. S. Eliot’s Early Poetry* (Lund: Lund University Press, 1996), pp.41-42.

⁴¹ “His quest, like that of other individuals in Eliot’s poems, is for a grail. The grail, however, is fantasy, artefact, not the real supernatural. The mermaids are related to the grail of *Parsifal* or to Siegfried conversing with the Rhine Maidens”; *Eliot* (London: Fontana, 1975), p.39.

and indeed most of Eliot's early poetry - as constituting a re-enactment of the *Odyssey*, suggesting additionally that Prufrock is the unexceptional soul that Odysseus takes as his reincarnated form in Plato's *Republic* X. Cuddy's argument is quite persuasive, though her own reading of the oyster-shells' significance stretches credulity somewhat⁴². Finally, Leonard Unger sees Prufrock's problem as one of self-expression:

to project the *real* nerves, the feelings in all their fullness which are the man himself is impossible. It is the incommunicable secret of mystics, and the ideal of romantic lovers. It is also the myth of romantic poets, from Byron and Shelley to Whitman, and since then. And it is distinctive of Eliot's modernness, of his modern romanticism, that he knows it is a myth, while still recognizing the impulse (which is not the same as the desire) to pursue it.⁴³

Unger's linking of the poem's impulse, as being common to romantic lovers and to mystics, is interesting, echoing Smith and MacKinnon, though one may surely question whether the projection of one's feelings, "real" or otherwise, is really the secret, let alone the chief concern, of mystics; mysticism prizes insight more so than expression, the esoteric rather than the exoteric. But, certainly, the connection of "Prufrock" and mysticism cannot be viewed as fanciful, in the light of the now published "Prufrock's Pervigilium" in *Inventions of the March Hare* (pp.43-44). This is a twenty-nine line passage which had been intended to go in the middle of the poem, and which very likely derives its title from the Latin poem *Pervigilium Veneris* ("The Vigil of Venus"), which was experiencing something of a revival at the time, and to which Eliot was to allude in *The Waste Land*. The poem celebrates the advent of Spring and the feast of Venus, but here the pervigilium describes a kind of dark night of the soul with no bright new morning indicated⁴⁴:

⁴² "Eliot's Classicism: A Study in Allusional Method and Design", in *T. S. Eliot Annual No.1*, ed. Shyamal Bagchee (Basingstoke and London: Macmillan, 1990), pp.27-62 (pp.29-30; 41-42; 43). "["Restaurants with oyster-shells"] is an explicit reference to Ulysses and Trojan beginnings, for oysters seem to have been a favourite dish in ancient Troy" (p.43).

⁴³ *Moments and Patterns* (Minneapolis: University of Minneapolis Press, 1956), p.20.

⁴⁴ See Ricks, *IOTMH*, pp.176-190. Ricks also draws attention to Pater's fantasised context to the authorship of *Pervigilium Veneris* (it is anonymous), wherein the poem is written by a man dying of some unspecified disease while his friend keeps vigil over him. "Pater's diseased description has the effect of invoking the dark sense of *Veneris*, not only Venus but the venereal" (*IOTMH*, p.178n.)

Then I have gone at night through narrow streets,
 Where evil houses, leaning all together
 Pointed a ribald finger at me in the darkness.
 Whispering all together, chuckled at me in the darkness.

And when the midnight turned and writhed in fever
 I tossed the blankets back to watch the darkness
 Crawling among the papers on the table
 It leapt to the floor and made a sudden hiss
 And darted stealthily across the wall

[...]

—I have seen the darkness creep along the wall
 I have heard my Madness chatter before day
 I have seen the world roll up into a ball
 Then suddenly dissolve and fall away.

(*IOTMH*, pp.43-44)

Eliot's omission of the pervigilium section from "Prufrock" may have been to do with a wish to make less obvious, or simply less significant, the motioning towards mysticism that MacKinnon would urge upon the hapless bachelor; on the other hand, it may have been simply down to the passage's inferior quality and its tone, which seems not quite Prufrock's voice but someone else's. Deliberately or reluctantly, the explicit thematic contrast of social and mystic rituals was dropped, in this poem at least. Consequently, the published poem has tended principally to give the impression of a character whose quest for earthly love suffers from too much mystic soul-searching, as opposed to one whose mystic quest suffers from too much searching for earthly love. But the balance is fine.

As for Unger's suggestion, on the evidence of "Prufrock", that Eliot's is the "modern romanticism" of disillusion, this is a debatable definition, and one might fear that the critic has confused the poet with the character. But that there should be such a wide range of views on what the poem is primarily "about" is understandable. It does, after all, come to no clear conclusion, ending with a statement which on the one hand undoubtedly has a kind of "rocket-burst" vitality ⁴⁴, but which is in another sense quite obscure:

⁴⁴ George Orwell, "Escape from the Consciousness of Futility" (1942), in *T. S. Eliot: 'Prufrock', 'Gerontion', Ash Wednesday and Other Shorter Poems: A Selection of Critical Essays*, ed. B. C. Southam (Basingstoke and London: Macmillan, 1978), pp.92-96 (p.95).

I have seen them riding seaward on the waves
 Combing the hair of the waves blown back
 When the wind blows the water white and black.

We have lingered in the chambers of the sea
 By sea-girls wreathed in seaweed red and brown
 Till human voices wake us, and we drown.

(*ECP*, p.17)

It is unclear whether Prufrock has escaped a terrible female threat, in the manner of the questers Odysseus and Parsifal, or whether he has had his fantasy cruelly shattered, whether his fantasy is a divine or a sexual paradise, and whether the voices that call him back are other male voices or the voices of the women in the room. It is not even clear whether it is himself or the mermaids who are wreathed in seaweed, nor are we even told exactly who else makes up the “we” of the final lines. The situation hovers between a world of air and one of water, between wakefulness and dream, so that there is no longer a clear distinction in terms of real and metaphorical landscape. Here, if nowhere else in the poem, may be the one moment when Prufrock’s insight and self-awareness most exceed those of the reader, and it is *we* who are unable to say exactly what he means. It is a poem which utilises such an ambiguous state of consciousness all the way through, “Rhapsody on a Windy Night”, which seems to me to be the first balanced realisation of Eliot’s combined treatment of gender, myth and allusion, and this poem is the subject of the next chapter.

Chapter Three

Midnight shakes the memory:

The symbolism of “Rhapsody on a Windy Night”.

3.1. Critical summaries

Examinations of “Rhapsody on a Windy Night” (1911, *ECP*, pp.26-28) have been undeservedly thin on the ground. Traditionally overlooked in considerations of the *Prufrock* volume in favour of the title poem and “Portrait of a Lady”, its free verse form may appear to have demanded similarly free, even careless, critical approaches from otherwise trenchant commentators. F. O. Matthiessen refers to it in passing as a “loosely flowing experiment” in the vein of the *Preludes*¹; D. E. S. Maxwell writes: “strictly speaking, the poem does not “mean” anything: it is purely the translation of a mood”, though he suggests that this mood does give the poem a unity²; F. R. Leavis’s evaluation that it merely marks a development of “that imagery of urban desolation which has done so much service to the verse of adolescent romantic pessimists”³ is the kind of back-handed compliment that verges on a slap. Lyndall Gordon applauds

the poet’s almost painful sensitivity to his impression of the deserted, vaguely sinister streets of Paris after midnight. But, from a philosophical point of view, Eliot’s experiment failed: the impressions do not converge, there is no intuition to be seized. I think, behind the poem, lies an Emersonian premise that one might cultivate an angle of vision whereby diverse objects are penetrated and illumined as part of one design.⁴

Most critics suggest an approach based on the ideas of the philosopher Henri Bergson, who influenced Eliot greatly around this time. I shall explain my disinclination to follow this path later in this chapter. Murray McArthur’s recent

¹ *The Achievement of T. S. Eliot: An Essay on the Nature of Poetry* (London: Oxford University Press, 1935), p.134.

² *The Poetry of T. S. Eliot* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1952), p.66.

³ *New Bearings in English Poetry*, 2nd edition (London: Penguin, 1972), pp.60-100, p.62.

⁴ *Eliot’s Early Years* (Oxford and London: Oxford University Press, 1977), p.41.

Lacanian reading unearths much more thoroughly, in my opinion, potentially fruitful lines of inquiry⁵, to which I will allude and hope to add.

This chapter will approach myth principally from an anthropological rather than literary perspective⁶. I will argue for the significance of the poem as a developmental stage in Eliot's treatment of male and female identity, and that this is achieved, in large part, through an employment of the myths and rituals of Osiris and Attis which the piece symbolically enacts. (I mean "symbolically" both in mythical and in psychoanalytical senses.) As such, it serves as a revealing prototype for much of what happens in *The Waste Land*, as well as shedding light on the symbolism and concerns of other poetry from the early period.

3.2. Summary of events in the poem.

From an initial reading of "Rhapsody", we might make the following descriptive summary: that the poem depicts a moonlit stroll through a modern urban environment, between the hours of midnight and four o' clock in the morning; at which point, the narrator, or "rhapsode", as McArthur refers to this figure⁷, a figure unnamed and undescribed, unidentified as male or female, though generally assumed to be male, appears to arrive home and goes to bed. In the course of his walk he sees a woman "who hesitates toward" him in a doorway, a cat eating "a morsel of rancid butter", and the moon itself. And the things he sees evoke strange images thrown up from his memory, such as a "stiff and white" branch washed up on a beach, a rusted spring in a factory yard, a child pocketing a "toy" that was running along a quay, eyes peering through lighted shutters, and a crab in a pool. He is also reminded of smells such as chestnuts in the street, "female smells in shuttered rooms", cigarettes, "cocktail smells in bars", and "sunless dry geraniums".

The action of the poem is demarcated by the street-lamps that the rhapsode passes, and by the stated movement of time: "Twelve o' clock", "Half-past one",

⁵ "Deciphering Eliot: "Rhapsody on a Windy Night" and the Dialectic of the Cipher", *American Literature*, 66: 3 (1994), 509-24.

⁶ That is to say, the "anthropology" of J. G. Frazer, whose fall from grace in this field is, as will be shown in Chapter Five, of no little significance to modern critical attitudes concerning the role of myth in *The Waste Land*. For the purpose at hand in this chapter, I am taking Frazer from the viewpoint of the early 1900s; that is, as a prominent comparative anthropologist.

⁷ "Rhapsode": "reciter of epic verse" (*OED*).

“Half past two”, “Half past three”, and “four o’ clock”. As far as the title is concerned, there is no clear evidence of a wind in the poem, though conceivably it might be the cause of the cat flattening itself in the gutter (l.30) - instinctive fear of the rhapsode seems equally likely - and it may be responsible for the “sputtering” of the gas lamps - again, this could just be the result of a faulty gas supply in an environment filled with images of decay.

3.3. Previous identifications of synthetic structure in the poem.

With further reference to the title, “rhapsody” could be taken to refer by analogy to a musical rhapsody; that is, an emotional, irregular piece, distinct parts stitched into a whole (*OED*). It can also mean “an extravagant song”. As I have suggested above, previous critical approaches have indeed tended towards an “irregular music” view of the poem’s synthetic structure, though there have been attempts to establish some underlying logic, such as Gertrude Patterson’s comparison of the poem’s juxtaposition of visual impressions and memories with Collage techniques in modern art ⁸. But practically all critics, including Patterson, have viewed the images themselves as random and worthless⁹, and have not tried to deduce any possible symbolism. Admittedly, the images may appear slightly haphazard on first reading, but to read Eliot’s poem as purely imagistic (that is, using images for vivid visual effect, rather than for symbolic effect, may be to deny the more important half of his poetic approach, particularly as symbolism is generally accepted as central in his poetry from *The Waste Land* onwards. It seems to me that symbolist methods underlie his work, in consistent patterns, from first to last.

With regard to the form and symbolism of “Rhapsody”, McArthur’s essay on what he calls the “dialectic of the cipher” has done us the service of pointing out hitherto unnoticed evidence of structural tightness in the poem. His concern is with “the number on the door” (l.81) near the end of the poem, identifying it as the number

⁸ T. S. Eliot: *Poems in the Making* (Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 1971), pp.97-102. See also Manju Jain, *A Critical Reading of the Selected Poems of T. S. Eliot* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991), p.68. Jain argues that the structure resides in a chain of associations.

⁹ For instance, Patterson, pp.99-100: “in this poem [...] past and present co-exist. Both worlds present equally abhorrent, equally useless images of life. [...] Clearly, ‘memory’ in this poem can only serve to make the present more sordid, more meaningless”.

five: there are five instances of the word “memory”, five “smells”, five “twists” and five statements of the time (McArthur, pp.518-20). He relates this to a Lacanian numerology that uses five to symbolise reproduction, maternity and paternity¹⁰, and relates *that* to images of sterility and twisted sexuality in the poem, such as the stiff white branch (the drowned male) and the rusted spring (a twisted male form “that is the vagina phallicized in the castration that is absolute loss” (McArthur, pp.514-15). He also notes that the image of the woman in the doorway “that opens on her like a grin” (l.18), the child pocketing the toy, and the cat with the butter, are all images of ingestion, of swallowing. To this one might also add the image “The bed is open” near the end of the poem, though, as will be discussed, this could also carry a number of other symbolic connotations.

3.4. A long walk: the problem of movement.

The nightmarish feel of the poem seems to owe itself, in addition to the strangeness of memory, to problems of movement, speech and sight. On a prosaic level, one might bear in mind that the night-time walk takes four hours at least (it may have started earlier). At a slow walking speed of, say, two and a half miles an hour, one must conclude that the rhapsode covers the best part of ten miles in the course of the poem - unless he stops at one or more points, a possibility I will discuss. Even if the rhapsode is walking a circular route or from one point to another and back again, this is quite a way and seems untypical of the kind of distance and duration that one might expect of a midnight walk. Eliot seems to be stretching somewhat the model of moonlit walks he found in Laforgue’s poetry. At the time Eliot wrote “Rhapsody” (March 1911, in Paris), he was in the habit of staying up all night conducting “vigils”; that is not the same thing as taking a four-hour walk, though “Prufrock’s Pervigilium” combines images of walking the streets and undergoing nightmares in a solitary room

¹⁰ “In Lacanian counting as proposed by Ellie Royland-Sullivan via Stuart Schneiderman, the human subject can count up to six in memory of the creation of the subject in the developmental phenomenology of desire”. The numbers stand for as follows: (0) pre-mirror stage primary identification; (1) symbiosis and mirror stage fusion; (2) phallus: *nom du père* separates child; (3) Oedipalisation, gender, and mother and father; (4) exogamy; (5) maternity or paternity; (6) perpetuity or lineage. (McArthur, p.520.)

as two sides of the same mystic coin (see section 2.5). In “Rhapsody”, certainly, length in time taken seems to take precedence over length in distance covered.

The feeling that the walk is drawn-out is reinforced by the recurrence of the street-lamp, which should suggest measurable distances covered, but which paradoxically also suggests a kind of stasis, a sense of not going forward; perhaps it is the same street-lamp throughout. So the walk takes on the aspect of a slow, sleepwalking dream. And as a consequence, the rhapsode seems disoriented, unsure as to where the walk takes him, and where it will end. In Lacan’s words, “our position in the dream is profoundly that of someone who does not see. The subject does not see where it is leading, he follows”¹¹. And as we shall see, the rhapsode is in any case unsure that he is the subject, rather than the object, of his own dream.

4.5. Regarding remarks: the problem of sight and speech in “Rhapsody” and “Portrait of a Lady”.

Another characteristic of dreams is the uncertainty of articulation, an unsureness as to who is speaking, an unsureness as to the reality of what one is hearing. Eliot suggests such uncertainty in “Rhapsody” by appearing to set the lamp in the role of a speaker-narrator, and by characterising the lamp’s speech with a noticeably strange, almost foreign vocabulary, in its commands or exhortations to “Regard” or “Remark” the various images in the street.

Nicholas Bachtin, defining poetic idiom, is quite firm that “the one thing it cannot do is introduce into the language what the language does not already possess”¹². It is the struggle nevertheless to achieve this which creates such tension in “Rhapsody”. Both *regard* and *remark* derive from the French: *regarder* - to look at, and *remarquer* - to notice. Even a contemporary English dictionary will still usually list these meanings for the English words, but only as secondary meanings; *regard* is nowadays more commonly taken to mean “consider as” or “evaluate”, and *remark* to mean “make a comment” or “make a verbal observation”. The difference between the

¹¹ Jacques Lacan, “The Split between the Eye and the Gaze”, in *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psycho-Analysis* (1973), ed. Jacques-Alain Miller, translated by Alan Sheridan (London: Penguin, 1977), pp.67-78, p.75.

¹² “English Poetry in Greek: Notes on a Comparable Study of Poetic Idioms”, *Poetics Today*, 6 (1985), 333-56, p.341.

old and new meanings is not enormous, admittedly, but both examples show a movement from an action of visual observation to a position at one remove, namely an “action” of mental or verbal observation or evaluation. If we remark today that the sky is blue, the verbal remark could still be said to be preceded by the visual remarking with our eyes. This duality of meaning is an unmistakable feature, indeed theme, in “Rhapsody”, which may be seen especially if we briefly consider the two previous uses of remark in “Portrait of a Lady”. The first is as follows:

You will see me any morning in the park
 Reading the comics and the sporting page.
 Particularly I remark
 An English countess goes upon the stage.
 A Greek was murdered at a Polish dance,
 Another bank defaulter has confessed.

(ECP, p.20)

On the one hand, the speaker/narrator is remarking in the sense of *noticing* something in a newspaper. But “You will see me” has already called attention to the notion of a speaker addressing us, so that we are equally likely to take his remark as a verbal one which we can hear, as well as a visual one private to himself. It seems the speaker/narrator is half aware of this tension, because in the immediately following lines he stresses “I keep my countenance, / I remain self-possessed” (ll.77-78). But this follows the three gossiping lines about the countess, the unfortunate Greek and the bank defaulter, which support the more modern sense of an idle remark. Unlike the bank defaulter, the narrator hopes to keep his remarks to himself, to keep them visual, not even necessarily to think about them. But he cannot help falling into verbal remarking: as the narrator of a poem, this tongue-tied character has no option but to speak. And with the second occurrence of the word remark, the balance shifts entirely from the old/private to the new/public meaning of the word:

I feel like someone who smiles, and turning shall remark
 Suddenly, his expression in a glass.
 My self-possession gutters; we are really in the dark.

(ECP, p.21)

The narrator could be said here to be suffering from both aspects of Lacan’s principle of the gaze, which is that “I see from only one point, but in my existence I

am looked at from all sides” (Lacan, p.75). A feeling of self-illuminated self-possession is disturbed by a realisation from a reflection of his facial “expression” that he cannot keep his “remarks” to himself, a fear that this visual remark draws attention to him as surely as a verbal one would, and that the outside world (including himself, in the form of his own reflection) is constantly watching and analysing him. His remark (look) here is shown to be as much an empty pose as the (spoken) ironic remark he has derived from newspaper gossip.

What is happening linguistically is that the word *remark* is being shifted here from its original “detached” sense into a more modern one wherein it cannot help but suggest emotion or communication of some sort. It can no longer keep itself to itself. Its presence in “Rhapsody” demonstrates, in part, the loss of control of the private sphere experienced in a nightmare.

For in “Rhapsody”, *regard* and *remark* are used exclusively in the old French sense, and the effect strikes the reader as very mannered and rather odd. The increasing remoteness of the old senses of *regard* and *remark* is emphasised by the fact that it is no longer a human narrator who is using these words; instead the rhapsode has a street-lamp or series of street-lamps commanding his vision. Again we recall Lacan’s suggestion: “Our position in the dream is profoundly that of someone who does not see. The subject, does not see where it is leading, he follows”. And this fits the condition of both the subject and the reader of the poem: because we cannot see, we need the street-lamp; at the same time, we cannot be exactly sure whether we are moving in any particular direction; and again, because in a sense we still cannot see, we must *listen* to the street-lamp, perhaps because we can no longer *regard* or *remark* with our own eyes.

“Regard that woman” (l.15), “Remark the cat” (l.35), “Regard the moon” (l. 50). The nightmare is, partly, that we are being told to see, but cannot see. The street-lamp is insistent but its words are strange, and one has to listen closely or it seems merely to be “sputtering” or “muttering”. The alien nature of its speech is emphasised by an actual incursion into French: “La lune ne garde aucune rancune” (l.51), an adaptation from Laforgue (See section 3.13). The poem shows diffused meaning (the modern English senses of *regard* and *remark*) haunted by controlled

meaning (the French *Regarde!* and *Remarque!*), by a ghost of linguistic memory trying to restore “All its clear relations, / Its divisions and precisions” (ll.6-7), a ghost which seems, however, to be external to the rhapsode, and thus threatening a kind of mental claustrophobia.

3.6. The enclosure of subject by object.

The rhapsode's inability, or refusal, to see what the lamp would show is explained, in part, by the nature of the images presented, and by the memories they evoke. As has been mentioned, McArthur defines the visual apparitions as images of swallowing, and the associated images relate to objects which threaten to enclose, and by doing so become subjects turning the “subject” of the poem, the rhapsode, into a possessed object himself. The poem refers to “corners”, “crevices”, “shuttered rooms”, and “corridors” (ll.53-67). Even the threatening practitioner of ingestion, the cat, is itself ingested into the gutter. The rhapsode fears enclosure, and we might characterize this as the male fear of enclosure by the female, the “spaces of the dark” (l.10) turning from a formless absence into a living form, in the same way that the mouth in a later poem, “Sweeney Erect”, is described as “This oval O cropped out with teeth” (*ECP* p.44). An apparent absence or wound is in fact a kind of lure enacted by a surrounding edge which threatens to trap or mutilate that which enters it. The woman in the doorway (a prostitute?) “hesitates toward” (l.17) the rhapsode in the light of the door and seems a threat, although, as I will discuss, the hesitating may suggest something quite different.

3.7. The mirror stage, instances of deflection, and identification with a crab.

In any case, the only image with which the rhapsode seems willing or able to establish contact is the crab from his memory: “And a crab one afternoon in a pool, / An old crab with barnacles on his back, / Gripped the end of a stick which I held him” (ll.43-45). The rhapsode seems to have a fellow feeling for the crab, perhaps wishing he was like him (“him” is the relevant word here: as McArthur points out, the crab is the only gendered object in the poem apart from the woman (McArthur, p.516) - I would also include the moon, but will consider the significance of that

later). Indeed, in the earlier poem, Prufrock has remarked “I should have been a pair of ragged claws / Scuttling across the floors of silent seas” (*ECP*, p.15)¹³. But the symbolism here is not that of the sea but of a rockpool, and the crab in “Rhapsody” is a “complete” crab, not the fragmented creature of “Prufrock”. The pool is symbolic not of immersion or swallowing, rather it is a mirror, and may be related in psychoanalytic terms to the mirror stage in Lacanian theory.

The “mirror stage” refers to a period in infant development when, having been made aware that it is a separate entity from its mother, the child comes to realise its own separate ego via an identification with another object, defined as a “mirror”¹⁴. Thereafter the child will be able to detach itself from its mirror, but initially it needs the reinforcement of a double that validates it. The identification with the crab only is the result of three other instances of failure to identify with another in the poem. The woman, the corner of whose eye “twists like a crooked pin” (l.22) seems to pose a threat, as I have mentioned and to which I will return. The child pocketing the toy on the quay seems to offer not even a “twisted” recognition of the rhapsode: “I could see nothing behind that child’s eye” (l.40), evoking, perhaps, Macbeth recoiling from the ghost of Banquo: “Thou hast no speculation in those eyes / Which thou dost glare with!” (Shakespeare, *Macbeth* III. iv. 95-96), and foreshadowing the description of two pairs of eyes in Eliot’s own *Coriolan*: “There is no interrogation in his eyes”, and “the eyes, watchful, waiting, perceiving, indifferent” (*ECP*, p.140). In each of these three occurrences, the viewer of the eyes has a feeling that he is the subject of the other’s gaze, but is given no intimation as to the workings behind or significance of the gaze in question.)

The third instance of failed visual contact follows the memory of the child’s eye: “I have seen eyes in the street / Trying to peer through lighted shutters” (ll.41-42). Here we have to ask whether the eyes are inside and trying to peer out, or outside and trying to peer in. And in either case, all that we can see of the possessor of those

¹³ In a letter of February 1915 to Conrad Aiken, Eliot brought up, apropos of nothing, “the idea of a submarine world of clear green light - one would be attached to a rock and swayed in two directions - would one be happiest or most wretched at the turn of the tide?”; *The Letters of T. S. Eliot*, Vol.1: 1898-1922, ed. Valerie Eliot (London: Faber and Faber, 1988) p.88.

¹⁴ Lacan, “The mirror stage as formative of the function of the I as revealed in psychoanalytic experience”, in *Écrits: A Selection*, translated by Alan Sheridan (London: Routledge, 1977), pp.1-7.

eyes are the eyes themselves. There is nothing for the rhapsode's gaze to fasten upon, to objectify, apart from objects which are themselves instruments of objectification, and which may indeed be objectifying the rhapsode. The owner of the eyes may possibly use a complete image of the rhapsode for its own identification, but this possibility is not returned.

Looking into the pool, the rhapsode's narcissistic impulse is altered into a mirror identification with the crab, an ugly, slow, trapped creature, unable to escape the external world's objectification of it (in the form of the barnacles on its back). And yet the crab is a self contained creature - with its external skeleton a projection of strength, unlike the branch on the beach earlier described as having "the secret of its skeleton" given up (ll.27-28)¹⁵ - and it operates via instinct rather than thought. It does not have to conceive of itself as subject or object, and the stick proffered by the rhapsode enables it to combine these two aspects in a way that the rhapsode might like to share. But again, this is not a mutual possibility.

3.8. The attempt to displace the female gaze with the male gaze.

Seeing and being seen has been a source of anxiety in other of Eliot's early poems; we may recall the peacocks in "Circe's Palace", and the "remarking" in the mirror in "Portrait of a Lady". As for "Prufrock", Carol Christ has commented:

The most visually precise images in the poem are those of Prufrock himself, a Prufrock carefully composed - "My morning coat, my collar mounting firmly to the chin, / My necktie rich and modest, but asserted by a simple pin" - only to be decomposed by the watching eyes of another into thin arms and legs, a balding head brought in upon a platter.¹⁶

The problem is one of fragmentation, not simply of "eyes that fix you in a formulated phrase" ("Prufrock"; *ECP*, p.15), but of eyes that may also dissect and disassemble. In "Prufrock" the fragmentation has also applied to female characters, rendering

¹⁵ The full reference is "A twisted branch upon the beach / eaten smooth, and polished / As if the world gave up / The secret of its skeleton" (ll.25-28). It is not grammatically clear whether the secret given up by the world would be that of the branch or of the world itself. The ambiguity seems very likely intentional.

¹⁶ Carol Christ, "Gender, Voice, and Figuration in Eliot's Early Poetry" in *T. S. Eliot: The Modernist in History*, ed. Ronald Bush (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), p.301.

sexual identification ambiguous¹⁷. In “Rhapsody” the male gaze is making an attempt to exercise control over this fragmentation - or rather, it is being commanded by the lamp to exercise such a control.

And the external world in the poem has *seemed* to demand a strong response in terms of the rhapsode’s gaze. Lacan writes “The world is all-seeing, but it is not exhibitionistic - it does not provoke our gaze. When it begins to provoke it, the feeling of strangeness begins too” (*Four Fundamental Concepts*, p.75). The question one must ask is whether the world’s strangeness in the poem is intrinsic and external or the product of the rhapsode’s own sight and memory. To establish the fact and/or nature of the exhibitionism, we might perhaps consider in more detail the figure of the woman in the doorway.

3.9. The woman in the doorway (i): Dante’s siren.

Half-past one,
 The street-lamp sputtered,
 The street-lamp muttered,
 The street-lamp said, ‘Regard that woman
 Who hesitates toward you in the light of the door
 Which opens on her like a grin.
 You see the border of her dress
 Is torn and stained with sand,
 And you see the corner of her eye
 Twists like a crooked pin.’ (ll.13-22)

This passage might be linked to two main literary sources, each of which may tell us something about the realization in this poem of the female by means of the male gaze. The sources are Canto XIX in Dante’s *Purgatorio*, principally, and also Wilkie Collins’ *The Woman in White*. The passage in Dante describes a dream experienced on one of the levels of Purgatory. Here is the relevant passage, Lines 7-36, as translated by John D. Sinclair:

There came to me in a dream a woman, stammering, cross-eyed. and crooked

¹⁷ For instance, “And I have known the arms already, known them all— / Arms that are braceleted and white and bare / (but in the lamplight, downed with light brown hair!)” (*ECP*, p.15); here, the feminine image of the bare white arms is transformed into something that is either suggestive of male hairiness or perhaps of something not even human at all.

on her feet, with maimed hands and sallow hue. I gazed at her, and as the sun revives cold limbs benumbed by the night, so my look gave her a ready tongue and then in a little time made her quite erect and coloured her wan features as love desires. When she had her speech thus set free she began to sing so that it would have been hard for me to turn my mind from her. 'I am,' she sang 'I am the sweet siren who beguiles the sailors in mid-sea, so great delight it is to hear me. I turned Ulysses, eager on his way, to my song, and he who dwells with me rarely departs, so wholly I content him.' Her lips were not yet closed again when a lady holy and alert appeared beside me to put her to confusion. 'O Virgil, Virgil, Who is this?' she said with anger. And he came with his eyes fixed on the honourable one; he seized the other and laid her bare in front, tearing her clothes, and showed me her belly. That awoke me with the stench that came from her. I turned my eyes to the good Master. 'Three times I have called thee,' he said. 'Rise and come, let us find the opening by which thou enterest.'¹⁸

Whilst the depiction of woman as temptress is a standard and ancient one, it is something of an oddity in Dante's *Divine Comedy*, which has a Hell and Purgatory mainly populated by Italian male contemporaries of the author. Sinclair is of the opinion "The dream of the siren is invented rather than imagined; its allegorical mechanism is cumbrous and its significance in detail is debatable" (*Purgatorio*, p.253n). But it may be helpful to our understanding of the equivalent figure in Eliot's poem, one which until now has been assumed to derive simply from the Parisian prostitutes in doorways depicted in Charles-Louis Philippe's novel *Bubu of Montparnasse*¹⁹. Nor does Dante simply present the siren as female sexuality impinging upon the passive male: stammering, cross-eyed and crooked on her feet, she is brought to life only by the dreamer's gaze. The dreamer invests her with characteristics that she cannot help but reflect. This too seems to be happening in Eliot's poem: the twisted corner of her eye could suggest the woman's own uncertainty as to what she is, as much as cunning or malice. In a sense, the woman only "becomes" a prostitute if the rhapsode activates this possibility in economic terms; the word "hesitates" takes on particular poignancy in this respect. And at the same time, while the rhapsode may not especially intend to "activate" the woman in this respect, in another sense the desire to establish the nature of this other in a

¹⁸ Dante Alighieri, *The Divine Comedy*, Vol. 2: *Purgatorio*, with translation by John D. Sinclair (London and New York: Oxford University Press, 1939) pp.245-247.

¹⁹ For example, Grover Smith, *T. S. Eliot's Poetry and Plays: A Study in Sources and Meaning* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1956), pp.23-24.

particular categorical sense may be, in psychoanalytic terms, an automatic response of the rhapsode's vision, as Elizabeth Grosz's description of the mirror stage might suggest:

The mirror stage is a necessarily alienating structure because of the unmediated tension between the fragmented or 'fragilized' body of experience; and the 'solidity' and permanence of the body as seen in the mirror. "It is the stability of the standing posture, the prestige of stature ... [which] ... sets the style for the identifications in which the ego finds its starting point and which leave their imprint in it forever." (Lacan)²⁰

In the passage in Dante, the male gaze "made her quite erect" ("e lo smarrito volto"; *Purgatorio*, p.244), giving her the kind of posture which should reflect male power and stature also. In Eliot's passage, it is unclear whether this is achieved: the rhapsode's eye looks down and back up her form, registering only two separate images of her body, located at either end, the "border of her dress" and the eye with its twisted corner. The sand staining the woman's dress could also suggest identification with Dante's siren, unless the woman has been on a building site rather than at the water-side. But neither we nor the rhapsode can be sure if the woman is a prostitute or simply a woman, perhaps a woman fearfully aware that the rhapsode's gaze may identify her in such a way. It is possible that the rhapsode does go inside with her, and this may account for the time between half-past one and the next stage of the poem, starting at "half-past two". Still, the problem of identity for both woman and rhapsode is not resolved in the surface narrative of the poem itself, and for the moment one must perhaps concur with Irigaray who writes that the male use of the female as a mirror for his own identity cannot help but result in "another specularization. Whose twisted character is her inability to say what she represents"²¹.

²⁰ Jacques Lacan: *A Feminist Introduction* (London: Routledge, 1990), pp.42-43.

²¹ "Any Theory of the Subject Has Always Been Appropriated by the Masculine", in *Speculum of the Other Woman*, transl. G. C. Gill (New York: Cornell University Press, 1985), pp.133-146, p.134.

3.10. The woman in the doorway (ii): Collins' women in white.

The other source I have suggested is *The Woman in White* (1860), a novel by Wilkie Collins²². The book is generally considered to be one of the first detective novels. The narrative, related by a series of characters, commences with the chance encounter, on a lonely moonlit road, of a drawing master, Walter Hartwright, and a strange young woman dressed all in white, an encounter which leads him into involvement in a bizarre mystery.

Eliot rated the book highly, and in his essay "Wilkie Collins and Dickens" (SE, pp.460-70) he defended Collins' employment of melodrama, differentiating it as far superior to most twentieth-century melodrama. For my purpose in relating *The Woman in White* to "Rhapsody", I would like to summarise some salient points about the novel. The environment and list of characters in the book may be described as predominantly feminised, fitting into the kind of feminised nineteenth-century literary tradition which Carol Christ has argued so influenced Eliot (see section 1.4). The chief male character, Walter Hartwright, has a mother and sister but no father, and teaches drawing to young ladies.

His only male friend, an Italian he saved from drowning, teaches Dante, aptly for our purpose, to young ladies. The three other central characters are female, and offer us representations of women which range from the stereotypical to the highly unusual. There is an idealised woman, Laura Fairlie; also the mad-woman in white, Anne Catherick, who is not as mad as she is conveniently categorised.

3.11. The man-woman and the mad-woman (i).

Finally, there is the man-woman, Marian Halcombe, Laura's half-sister, whose bodily beauty, according to Walter's conventional aesthetics of femininity, is marred by its crowning with a head described as ugly and masculine. Eliot quoted at length from the passage where Walter first meets her (SE, p.466), and Walter's subsequent comments seem worth quoting here:

To see such a face as this set on the shoulders that a sculptor would have longed to model - to be charmed by the modest graces of action through

²² *The Woman in White* (WIW) (London: Penguin, 1974).

which the symmetrical limbs betrayed that beauty when they moved, and then to be almost repelled by the masculine form and the masculine look of the features in which the perfectly-shaped figure ended - was to feel a sensation oddly akin to the helpless discomfort familiar to us all in sleep, when we cannot reconcile the anomalies and contradictions of a dream. (WW, p.59)

Eliot applauds Marian as being one of Collins' two finest characterisations - the other being the effeminate Count Fosco. The significance of the androgynous figure is considered elsewhere in this study, and I shall return to this characterisation of Marian shortly in this chapter. At this point one might say that Marian's masculine femininity serves, in part, as a counterpart to the idealised feminine Laura, Laura's other counterpart being the mad Anne Catherick to whom, physically, she bears some resemblance. In a sense, Anne and Marion claim more of our attention in the novel than Laura, invested as they are with considerably more speech and action, so that Laura may be said to become a mirror for *them*, more so than them existing as imperfect analogues of her.

The passage in the novel which is of particular significance to Eliot's woman in the doorway describes an evening at a country house where Walter has been employed to teach drawing to Laura and Marian. Having been told by him about his encounter with the anonymous woman in white, Marian has linked this figure to the young Anne Catherick, a protégée of Marian's mother, as described in letters dating back eleven years. Marian is reading the letters to Walter, while he watches the figure of Laura walking up and down the moonlit terrace, also dressed in white:

As [Marian] raised the letter to the light of the candle, Miss Fairlie turned from the balustrade, looked doubtfully up and down the terrace, advanced a step towards the glass doors, and then stopped, facing us. (WW, p.85)

As Marian continues to read out loud, Walter becomes possessed by a feeling of strangeness similar to the one he first felt when he met the woman in white on the lonely road:

There stood Miss Fairlie, a white figure alone in the moonlight; in her attitude, in the turn of her head, in her complexion, in the shape of her face, at that distance and under those circumstances, of the woman in white! The

doubt which had troubled my mind for hours and hours past flashed into conviction in an instant. That something wanting was my own recognition of the ominous likeness between the fugitive from the asylum and my pupil at Limmeridge House.

"You see it!" said Miss Halcombe. She dropped the useless letter, and her eyes flashed as they met mine. "You see it now, as my mother saw it eleven years since!"

"I see it - more unwillingly than I can say. To associate that forlorn, friendless, lost woman, even by an associated likeness only, with Miss Fairlie, seems like casting a shadow on the future of the bright creature who stands looking at us now. Let me lose the impression again, as soon as possible. Call her in, out of the dreary moonlight - pray call her in!" (WIV, p.86)

3.12. Sources of illumination.

Marian here fills the role of "Rhapsody's" street-lamp ("You see it!"), illuminating and explaining the mystery as she sees it: that is, the resemblance between the woman in white and the young girl in white described in the old letter. Walter does not see the same figure; he sees Laura becoming an analogue of the woman in white. In either case, parallel identifications are being made here, identifications of which the woman in white is the central symbol, be she evoked by the letter or by Laura's white figure.

Walter finds his idealised image of Laura disturbed, though one has to ask whether his identification of Laura with Anne is objective or subjective (we are not yet aware of other characters' opinions that the two women resemble each other closely). The role of the moon, which has turned Laura into a "bright figure", in the very next sentence becomes "dreary". Walter's mind and gaze has constructed two alternative women in one body - the idealised woman and the mad woman, a resemblance Marian dismisses as "superstition". And it is just such a split between the normal and the abnormal or insane that Eliot seems to be suggesting in his poem, in addition to the other duality - that of the holy lady/prostitute - which he has taken from Canto XIX.

3.13. Madness in "Rhapsody".

The notion of madness is evoked early in "Rhapsody" by the lines "Midnight shakes the memory / As a madman shakes a dead geranium" (ll.11-12). The second

line here may have been taken merely as a metaphor or simile, the midnight shaking the memory in *the same way as* a madman might shake a dead geranium. The image is vivid though not obviously explicable. But if we read the shaking of the flower as a definite action taking place in the rhapsode's narrative at the same time as a madman shakes a dead geranium, and recall that the rhapsode later remembers "sunless dry geraniums" (ll.62-63)²³, then the madman may be the rhapsode himself. We cannot be sure, and he seems equally uncertain. The gaze he directs at the woman may be in part intended to verify whether he too has a twisted eye, the look of a madman.

In this respect, one obvious aspect of lunar imagery can be applied here: the moon triggers lunacy in men. Part of the description of the moon in the poem seems specifically to deny this: "La lune ne garde aucune rancune" (l.51), means "The moon bears no grudge", and is a significant alteration from Eliot's source in Laforgue, "Là, voyons, mam'zell la Lune, / Ne gardons pas ainsi rancune"²⁴ (the first line of which means "Let us look there at Mademoiselle the moon)". The second line is ambiguous and could be translated as "let us likewise bear no grudge", but in the context of Laforgue's poem, it seems to mean "Let us bear no grudge (unlike her)". Eliot's moon seems blameless, bearing no grudge, indeed "The moon has lost her memory". But the lamp's description of the moon still suggests something mad to the rhapsode's mind:

'She winks a feeble eye
 She smiles into corners.
 She smooths the hair of the grass.
 The moon has lost her memory.
 A washed out smallpox cracks her face,
 Her hand twists a paper rose,
 That smells of dust and eau de Cologne,
 She is alone
 With all the old nocturnal smells
 That cross and cross across her brain.'

(ll.52-53)

²³ To McArthur, the significance of the geranium may be that its odour is like that of the human body, and that the number of petals it has fits the cipher pattern he has suggested: five.

²⁴ "Complainte de Cette Bonne Lune", ll.7-8, *Poems of Jules Laforgue*, transl. Peter Dale (London: Anvil, 1986), p.48.

winking eye - which could refer to a crater on the planet - but also a hand. The smallpox, the eau de Cologne, and the twisted paper rose are images of female artifice hiding a diseased nature. So the feeble eye's wink becomes not so much defensive or sleepy as seductive, in a grotesque way. The rhapsode, or lamp, imbues the once-chaste moon with the characteristics, real or imagined, of the woman or prostitute encountered earlier in the poem.

3.14. The man-woman and the mad-woman (ii).

What the male gaze has seen and envisioned in the poem may be a true vision of a diseased world, or a diseased vision of a "normal" world, or a combination. In psychoanalytic terms, we cannot be entirely sure what has happened in the poem and only have the rhapsode's mental images as our guide. They certainly suggest a fear of the female as predatorial and corrupt, as in the image of the broken spring, "Rust that clings to the form that the strength has left" (l.31). Since the rhapsode appears to be in a state of only semi-consciousness, we are offered clues and hints which we might not be likely to elicit from a conscious narrator, but lack the interpretative "relations" and "precisions" that such a conscious mind might offer.

Is this madness or dream? To Walter Hartwright, the masculine-feminine appearance of Marian gives him "a sensation oddly akin to the helpless discomfort familiar to us all in sleep, when we cannot reconcile the anomalies and contradictions of a dream"; In the case of "Rhapsody", McArthur rearranges this gender-dream duality thus:

The question of gender in this text is generated, I would argue, by what Serge Leclaire has called, after Lacan, the hysteric's life question: "*am I a man or a woman?*" This question is densely imbricated through the problematic of castration as absolute loss with what Leclaire defines as the obsessional's life question: "*am I dead or alive?*". (McArthur, p.516)

This is not, admittedly, quite simply a rearrangement; in the place of consciousness/unconsciousness (dream), McArthur has life/death. Nevertheless, if the obsessional's life question impinges upon the manifestation and meaning of the hysteric's, one might also maintain the importance of consciousness / unconsciousness as a factor in the manifestation and meaning of the poem's "madness" as a whole. What I mean is

that if the rhapsode is conscious, then one may view the poem as the exhibition of a neurosis, and interpret the private symbolism accordingly; to some extent, after McArthur's example, this is what I have done so far. But if the rhapsode is unconscious, or only partly conscious, then other interpretations are possible. I do not mean to suggest that the rhapsode is simply asleep and dreaming the whole poem, but the poem clearly has the quality of some kind of nightmare or trance, if one does not simply wish to view the poem as exemplifying Bergsonian theories of time. To characterise the rhapsode as neurotic seems to me on one level accurate, but we come back to the unanswerable question of whether this is a diseased vision of the world or a true one.

Frye argues that

for the psychologist all dream symbols are private ones, interpreted by the personal life of the dreamer. For the critic there is no such thing as private symbolism, or, if there is, it is his job to make sure that it does not remain so.²⁵

What I would like to do in the latter part of this chapter is to follow Frye's directive to elucidate the poem's "private" symbolism, to treat the poem as archetypal, public dream as advocated by Jung. Nevertheless, the mythic archetypes I will suggest will not simply serve to displace or dwarf the Lacanian approach hitherto discussed; rather, they may also be seen as validating its apparently neurotic gender concerns.

3.15. A note on Bergsonian philosophy in interpretations of "Rhapsody".

I shall first briefly explain why the ideas of Bergson have not yet been accorded space in this discussion of "Rhapsody". This is mainly because they appear to have been widely misunderstood and misrepresented, and can be fairly complicated even without this. Certainly, Eliot had recently been reading Bergson's *Matter and Memory*²⁶, and its influence in the phrasing alone of this poem and of "Prufrock" and "Portrait" is detectable. Put very basically, Bergson argues that memory is not simply a store of images from the past, but rather a faculty on many levels of consciousness

²⁵ *Anatomy of Criticism: Four Essays* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1957), p.111.

²⁶ Henri Bergson, *Matter and Memory* (1896), authorised transl. by Nancy Margaret Paul and W. Scott Palmer (London: Swan Sonnenschein, 1911).

which interpenetrates our “present” perception of the world. Memory is not matter, it is a state, and can be subservient to, or in control of, present perception and action, according to varying circumstances. Bergson also differentiates between the automatic kind of memory used in everyday action (“learned memory”, or “habit”) and the deeper “memory par excellence” which stores all past images (Bergson, p.95). Modern use of Bergson’s ideas here has tended to latch on to what starts as a side effect of his memory-perception explanation: “memory, inseparable in practise from perception, imports the past into the present, contracts into a single intuition many moments of duration” (Bergson, p.80). Critics have focused on the many moments of duration (*durée*) rather than on the memory; certainly, Bergson is now noted in philosophy for his theories of duration and of *élan vital*, memory having been forgotten²⁷. This is not so wrong, except that critics have tended to oversimplify or even misrepresent what Bergson was actually saying about time, so that he becomes associated with the fragmentation and distortion of time in the modern world:

The new time consciousness, which enters philosophy in the writings of Bergson, does more than express the experience of mobility in society, of acceleration in history, of discontinuity in everyday life. The new value placed on the transitory, the elusive and the ephemeral, the very celebration of dynamism, discloses a longing for an undefiled, immaculate and stable present.²⁸

Thus writes Jurgen Habermas. But Bergson was not suggesting that time was fragmented and discontinuous *in our normal experience*. Instead, it appears to be fluid, and this is not *despite* the existence of many moments in one moment, but *because* of it:

There is nothing that is instantaneous. In all that goes by that name there is already some work of our memory, and consequently of our consciousness, which prolongs into each other, so as to grasp them in one relatively simple intuition, an endless number of moments of an endlessly divisible time.

(Bergson, p.73)

²⁷ See, for instance, *The Oxford Companion to Philosophy*, ed. Ted Honderich (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1995) pp.88-89.

²⁸ Jurgen Habermas, “Modernity - An Incomplete Project”, *New German Critique*, 22 (Winter 1981), 3-15, Repr. in *Postmodernism: A Reader*, ed. Thomas Docherty (Hemel Hempstead: Harvester, 1993) pp.98-109, p.100.

Whatever this says about time (while clearly talking about memory), it seems to have very little in common with the attributes on Habermas's list.

As far as Bergsonian criticisms of Eliot's poem are concerned, most tend to stress, without really explaining, the time/duration element of Bergson²⁹. Piers Gray does examine Bergson's discussion of memory in some depth, and takes Gordon to task for her suggestion that from a philosophical point of view the poem fails and that the "impressions" fail to converge (section 3.1). Gray argues that on the contrary, it succeeds very well in conveying how the tyranny of memory can inhibit rather than facilitate action³⁰. But he is certainly in accord with the idea that the recollections and associations presented in the poem are "random" (Gray, pp.47, 51).

Gray goes too far, it may be argued, in deducing from Bergson that the encroachment of memory when the body is to a greater or lesser extent inactive (for instance, in sleep) is "useless" and "random" (Gray, p.43). What Bergson says is that while the kind of memories that come back in these circumstances are indeed chance ones with their own "caprices", they can become more and more removed from their personal and original form and therefore more capable of being applied to the present preoccupation and of determining it (Bergson, pp.129-30). They are not necessarily "useless". Gray develops his theme of the tyranny of random memory in "Rhapsody" from Bergson's statement that "a human being who should *dream* his life instead of living it would no doubt thus keep before his eyes at each moment the infinite multitude of the details of his past history" (Bergson, p.201). Gray summarises this as "Life, paradoxically, is richest in the state of inertia", suggesting that this is "an ironical triumph of human consciousness" (Gray, p.43), and then goes on to detect no richness, only sterility and horror, in the memories that encroach in "Rhapsody". But there is no real irony here; Bergson was not suggesting that the human being in question would have a "rich" existence, indeed he points out that such a person would

²⁹ Robert Crawford is a conspicuous exception, identifying the interpenetration of memory and present perception as the crux of Matter and Memory, as suggested above; he suggests Bergson's main lasting influence on Eliot concerned his ideas on anthropology and evolution: *The Savage and the City in the Work of T. S. Eliot* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987), pp.7-8, 67.

³⁰ *T. S. Eliot's Intellectual and Poetic Development, 1909-1922* (Brighton: Harvester, 1982) pp.39-52.

see only how each of the images of his memory differed from each other and would be unable to relate them, whereas at the other extreme, a man of pure impulse, with only a “learned” memory and no “memory par excellence”, would see only how each situation resembled others and be unable to distinguish between them (Bergson, p.201); he was not proposing that either hypothetical extreme was desirable (or likely). Gray suggests that the rhapsode is indeed the man who dreams his life, and who therefore cannot associate the “random” images of the poem. While he does a welcome service in criticism of the poem of stressing the importance of memory and the unconscious, “random recollections” are not of much more use to us than Gordon’s “random impressions”. The rhapsode may (or may not) be unable to connect his memories, but this does not excuse the critic from trying to do so; McArthur manages at least to establish the thematic links of a neurosis.

One area of *Matter and Memory* that may deserve comment with regard to “Rhapsody” is Bergson’s discussion of diseases of recognition, or “psychic blindness”, whereby the link between different aspects of the memory is severed as the result of a physical or mental injury (Bergson, pp.108-17). Thus a patient might recognise that his wife was a woman but not that she was his wife. He has a partial recognition, then, and Bergson gives another illustration of this from an instance not of when one or more levels of memory have been *lost*, but rather of when levels of memory are being *built up* into automatic recognition but are not yet complete. The illustration is of a man walking a route through a town along unfamiliar streets: to begin, the body is uncertain of its route, relying on a building-up from scratch by visual perception; eventually this walk will become learned, an automatic body-memory; but in between, there is a state of “perception followed step by step by automatism just impending” (Bergson, p.110). So the strangely static quality of the rhapsode’s walk could equally be viewed as symptomatic of a process of *familiarisation* as of *defamiliarisation*. But there is only so far we get in debating whether the rhapsode is awake or asleep, sane or insane - none of which can be or need be ruled out. What still needs to be examined is that obsessional question: Is he dead or alive?

3.16. Osiris and Attis myth and ritual in the poem.

The poem could be read as enacting (consciously or unconsciously) the ancient myths and rituals of Osiris and Attis in the modern world. I am employing Frazer's accounts of these myths and rituals in *The Golden Bough*³¹. As far as Eliot's familiarity with Frazer's accounts (which are in any case secondary ones) in 1911 is concerned, one cannot be sure, but Robert Crawford has discussed Eliot's interest in and familiarity with contemporary anthropological works during his years at Harvard (1908-1914) and points to an existing paper Eliot wrote in 1913 on the evolution of religion, which does refer directly to Frazer³². He was familiar with Fitzgerald's *Rubaiyat*, to which Fitzgerald supplied his own notes concerning references to fertility myths and rituals. And even if he had not become familiar via Frazer, the justification of myths (for Jung and Frye, at any rate) is that they tell us what we already unconsciously know. We echo them, regardless of our awareness or lack of awareness of the significance of their actions. Eliot affirmed this in 1921: "The Golden Bough can be read in two ways: as a collection of entertaining myths, or as a revelation of that vanished mind of which our mind is a continuation"³³.

A lecture on analytic psychology and poetry by C. G. Jung a year later concurs with this view. Jung differentiates between "introverted" literature, which is the product of the conscious mind, and "extraverted" literature - the greatest literature, in his view - which is unconscious in origin and highly symbolistic in its manifestation. He is also at pains to distinguish between two strands of the unconscious, the "personal" and the "collective", and brings up again for the purpose of our argument the question of whether we should interpret such material as anthropologists looking for archetypes or as psychoanalysts detecting neuroses:

The work of art [...] as well as being symbolic, has its source not in the *personal unconscious* of the poet, but in a sphere of unconscious mythology whose primordial images are the common heritage of mankind. I have called this sphere the *collective unconscious*, to distinguish it from the personal unconscious. The latter I regard as the sum total of all those psychic

³¹ J. G. Frazer, *The Golden Bough: A Study in Magic and Religion*, abridged edn. (1922) (Ware: Wordsworth, 1993).

³² Crawford, *The Savage and the City in the Work of T. S. Eliot* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987), pp.72-73, 88.

³³ "London Letter", *Dial*, 71 (October 1923), 453.

processes and contents which are capable of becoming conscious and often do, but are then suppressed because of their incompatibility and kept subliminal. Art receives tributaries from this sphere too, but muddy ones; and their predominance, far from making a work of art a symbol, merely turns it into a symptom. We can leave this kind of art without injury and without regret to the purgative methods employed by Freud.³⁴

By its own definition, the existence of shared myths in a collective unconscious cannot be proved; one can only point to collections such as *The Golden Bough*, and allow readers to draw their own conclusions. I am not trying to prove the truth of such myths; the task here is to measure how convincingly and how instructively this poem corresponds with such myths.

3.17. Parallel themes in Osiris and Attis.

The Egyptian Osiris myth and the Greek Attis myth, to which Eliot refers directly in the *Notes to The Waste Land* (ECP, p.80), are linked by the moon in the personifications of Isis and Diana respectively. Isis is the sister and lover of Osiris, a fertility god who must die and be resurrected each year. The basic myth recounts that Osiris undergoes a period of death in the Nile, after which his body is recovered by Isis and he is resurrected, restoring fertility to the land. According to varying strands of the myth, his body has either been completely dismembered or his genitals have been eaten by fishes, so that Isis constructs a phallus for him. The Attis myth also relates to dismemberment, as he is supposed to be beautiful youth and follower of Diana who castrates himself under a tree; Diana is the goddess of chastity, and she can only become fertile in this indirect manner of “receiving” the male. In the Attis ritual, many an excited worshipper impulsively castrated himself, and flung the dismembered parts through the windows of households, which “thus honoured, had to furnish him with a suit of female attire and female ornaments, which he wore for the rest of his life”. They then became priests of Diana. Frazer goes on to muse soberly “When the tumult of emotion had subsided, and the man had come to himself again, the irrevocable sacrifice must often have been followed by passionate sorrow

³⁴ “On the Relation of Analytical Psychology to Poetry”, *The Collected Works of C. G. Jung* (24 vols), Vol. XV, ed. Herbert Read, Michael Fordham, Gerhard Adler, transl. R. F. C. Hull (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1966), pp.65-83, p.80.

of lifelong regret” (Frazer, p.350). This myth and ritual is clearly relevant to *The Waste Land* with regard to the role of gender reversal and emasculation, but most critics have barely touched upon dismemberment as a theme, and even then rarely dwelt at any length on it.

3.18.Osiris and a night of all souls.

The Osiris ritual, meanwhile, is supposed to have taken place at the time of a full or new moon, whose date, about halfway through November, “may have been a night of all souls” (Frazer, p.374). The souls of the dead were supposed to make their way through the streets of the Egyptian cities, on a journey from their graves to their former homes, and back again. (These are, of course, the original apophrades referred to by Harold Bloom; see section 1.2.) Food was laid out for them in their houses by their families. Frazer notes, “A great feature of the festival was the nocturnal illumination. People fastened rows of oil-lamps to the outside of their houses, and the lamps burned all night long” (Frazer, p.373). He states that this “universal illumination of the houses” was peculiar to one night of the year. The brief ritual resurrection of the dead was a counterpart to, and necessary condition for, the imminent resurrection of the temporarily dead Osiris. The lamps presumably represent the flame of the spirit generally, and also both the sun (Osiris) and moon (Isis).

3.19. The rhapsode’s journey.

From a mythical perspective, then, the rhapsode’s journey could be seen as the walk of the living dead through the illuminated streets, a necessary parallel to the awakening of the dead god, because each dead soul is a component and microcosm of the dead god, the spirit of the land. Hence the succession of street-lamps that he must pass. The “whispering lunar incantations” that “dissolve the floors of memory” at the start of the poem (ll.43), which have not been previously explained, and instead passed over as indistinctly evocative lyricism, may now be related to the ceremonial lamentations of the people on this night, performed before the image of a cow, a symbol of Isis/the moon - perhaps the same cow who jumped over the moon in the

nursery rhyme. Likewise the street-lamps beating like fatalistic drums in Eliot's poem are the people beating their breasts in mourning - a characteristic of both the Attis and Osiris rituals - or the "rumbling drums" that precede the Attis castration ritual (Frazer, p.349). Then, the rancid butter eaten by the cat suggests that the food required for the ritual has either been already eaten, or that only old scraps were offered³⁵. I will discuss the nature and significance of the later part of the rhapsode's journey in due course, but first we must make a final reassessment of the woman in the doorway.

3.20. The woman in the doorway (iii): mythic symbols.

The woman in the doorway has a triple significance with regard to the Osiris myth, as well as symbolising the Attis myth and its intrusion into this particular modern day Osiris ritual. With regard to the former myth, she represents Isis, who goes to the waterside to recover and re-endow with a phallus the body of Osiris. The woman's house, if she is a prostitute, might very likely be near the docks of a city, hence perhaps the situation of the child's pocketing the toy on a "quay". In that sense the rhapsode/ghost is threatened with having his journey cut short. So she is also perhaps the siren of Dante's parallel text, who attempts to keep the soul of the protagonist trapped beneath the sea, whether real or that of the unconscious. And this is Osiris' present situation.

In that case, the "rhapsody" of the title may be the song of the siren, to whom we might also ascribe the "lunar incantations". Indeed "incantations" is the only word in the poem that can directly be related to either of the two possible meanings of "rhapsody" given earlier. Critics have tended toward the analogy of a piece of music, as in "Preludes" or "Four Quartets", and as such "Rhapsody on a Windy Night" has been taken as poetic mood music, rather than an articulated song. There is more evidence for the latter view; indeed, there is no evidence for the former. The

³⁵ See also Genesius Jones, *Approach to the Purpose: A Study of the Poetry of T. S. Eliot* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1964), pp.87-95: discussing Eliot's poetry with regard to three strands of love - Eros, Agape, and Charis - Jones identifies the rancid butter and the cocktail bar as twisted representations of a communal religious food-ritual (which would come under the category "Agape"). Though he is analysing the poetry principally with regard to Christian belief and symbolism, Jones, too, makes the link with primitive food-rituals and their association with the sacrifice of a god. He is of the opinion that in "Rhapsody" Eliot is objectifying an "Infernal vision" (p.95).

rhapsody may be likened to the “worn-out common song” mentioned in “Portrait of a Lady”, part of the dull background of daily ritual, here, however, insinuating itself in a way that makes its presence strongly felt at some level of consciousness, though not immediately interpretable.

The final symbolic significance of the woman to Osiris is another example of identification with Isis, in that, as has been discussed in psychoanalytic terms, she may be related to the corrupted moon (see section 3.13). The woman is a contingent symbol for the moon - in itself a symbol - since “The moon has lost her memory” and can no longer understand her significance in the myth, or play her role in the ritual except by dumbly mirroring the rays of the sun. The street-lamps too, used in the myth as secondary, back-up representations of her, must now provide all the significant illumination. Hence their speaking role, which includes the telling of the time. The lamp certainly speaks at “Four o’clock” (l.80). Hitherto it has been ambiguous as to whether the lamp or perhaps a watch provides the time. The moon’s movement is a marker of the time at night, like the sun in the day, so this is another role it has relinquished or delegated. And the lamps threaten to be insufficient to their task, sputtering and muttering, subject to the possibility of their imminent extinction, and, as I have suggested earlier, perhaps appearing dim and incomprehensible in their speech to the rhapsode. The moon is also the chief instrument of time-telling in Dante’s system of Hell. As in *The Waste Land*, the streets of the modern city become the underworld overground, even if for one night only in this poem.

The woman’s significance as friendly or hostile to the rhapsode/ghost is also partly explained by her relation to Attis. For whereas the moon Isis attempts to reconstitute the male in the Osiris myth and ritual, the moon Diana also demands and effects the castration of Attis and his later representatives. Nor is it a reversible castration - the male is not only unmanned in order to fertilize her, he is also, as I have described, feminised, made the symbolic representative of the female divinity. In this respect, the woman in the doorway threatens, as I have discussed earlier, the enclosure or castration of the male. The rhapsode/ghost appears to escape the lure of the woman, though with a somewhat disturbed mind, but the Attis myth and ritual will intrude again at the end of the poem.

3.21. The Rhapsode's choice.

The end of the poem combines Attis, Osiris and Christian myth, and offers several possible resolutions, concluding with the rhapsode at the point of having to make his choice. The last section is

The lamp said,
 'Four o'clock,
 Here is the number on the door.
 Memory!
 You have the key,
 The little lamp spreads a ring on the stair.
 Mount.
 The bed is open; the toothbrush hangs on the wall,
 Put your shoes at the door, sleep, prepare for life.'

The last twist of the knife.

In a perfectly valid sense this is simply the weary return of a night-walker to his lodgings in a dreary modern city. But the symbolism that may be found here matches and reinforces that of the rest of the poem. Ending the poem at four o'clock is particularly significant. I referred earlier to the inexplicable length of the walk from midnight until this time. The hour of midnight at the start marked the "witching hour" when the ghost starts its walk on the night of all souls. Four o'clock, by contrast, is traditionally the hour of Christ's resurrection, and may be taken here to extend to any dead god. I also mentioned earlier that there appears to be no evidence of wind in the poem. And that is because the wind only rises, or is able to rise, now, a wind being the symbol of the divine spirit, "pneuma". Here one might point to a later short poem by Eliot, "The wind sprang up at four o'clock", the title and the poem itself confirming the poet's awareness of the Christian symbolism of four o'clock:

The wind sprang up at four o'clock
 The wind sprang up and broke the bells
 Swinging between life and death
 Here, in death's dream kingdom
 The waking echo of confusing strife
 Is it a dream or something else
 When the surface of the blackened river
 Is a face that sweats with tears?

(*ECP*, p.148, ll.1-8)

Is it a dream or something else? The lines “Memory! / You have the key” suggest the moment of understanding in the rhapsode’s confused mind; it is here that he must make his choice between kinds of life and death, kinds of sleep and wakefulness.

The memory, or memories, that the rhapsode has just unlocked can point to several possible courses of action. It seems, in part, that the memories of sexual attraction and repulsion return. In Canto IX of *Purgatorio*, Virgil has exhorted Dante to “rise and come, let us find the opening by which thou enterest”. The choice of death may be sexual or spiritual, with only the latter offering a (slim) possibility of kind of life thereafter. The language at the end of the poem is multivalent. “Mount” could suggest a step up to the block of execution, or an exhortation to the sexual act. The phrase where all the possible symbolic resolutions coincide, though, is “The bed is open”.

3.22. The open bed.

The only possible literally descriptive reason for using the word “open” would be if the bed were a four-poster surrounded by curtains, but the sparse images of the toothbrush on the wall and the shoes at the door make such opulence seem unlikely. The bed may give a mental image of being stood up on end like a door or mouth, corresponding to the doorway that has framed the woman “like a grin”. And the toothbrush hanging on the wall may symbolise the diminution of the Hanged God, a paltry modern phallic symbol; the fact that it is a toothbrush may also refer ironically again to the bed as the site of female enclosure or castration, via the related image of the *vagina dentata*, a vagina with teeth. At the same time, the shoes at the door could also suggest their ritual removal at the door of a temple. The bed may therefore be a place of worship, sacrifice, or resurrection. It is unclear whether the commitment to be made in this place is to be sexual or spiritual.

The final possible form that the open bed may take is one which seems to confirm the significance of Osiris to a mythical reading of the poem. One account of the Osiris myth relates that his death came about via a kind of combination of the stories of Cinderella’s slipper and Procrustes’ bed, in which Osiris’s brother, Set, secretly took his measurements and constructed an ornate “coffer”, which he then

offered to whomever of his seventy-odd brothers fitted it exactly. Of course, none fitted properly until “Last of all Osiris stepped into it and lay down. On that the conspirators ran and slammed the lid down on him, nailed it fast, soldered it with molten lead, and flung the coffer into the Nile” (Frazer, p.363). The coffer/bed becomes a coffin.

Robert Crawford has dismissed the last line of the poem, “The last twist of the knife”, as one that “topples bitter irony into melodrama” (Crawford, p.60), but the use of the image of the knife is completely appropriate to the kind of life for which the rhapsode must sleep in preparation. The bed is one he may, understandably, not want to get into, and the knife is a male symbol which may however turn into “the key” (l.84) and lock him into a state of enclosure, sexual or spiritual. The knife which might be expected to “wound” if anyone, the female, threatens to turn itself upon itself, as in the case of Attis. That is some twist.

3.23. Conclusion

If one were looking for a point in Eliot’s poetry where the significance of myth might be expected to span the divide between the conscious and the unconscious, where more likely than here, in “Rhapsody on a Windy Night”’s depiction of the semi-conscious modern mind? As much here as in *The Waste Land*, we may be made aware of the possible triumph or disaster emanating from the urges of a collective unconscious in the mind of the present, in a setting that seems to echo the structure of the world of personal and collective mythic symbolism. It is, however, a place so degraded as to make slim the likelihood of a satisfactory resolution. The mythic ritual collapses into the banality of the day-to-day modern ritual, just as the lunar incantations become a worn-out song to a dead planet. Like the souls whose night walk once a year takes them back eventually to their graves, the rhapsode’s journey brings him back to what may be a different kind of deathly existence.

Writing about symbolic poetry, Jung recalls

We have often found out that a poet who has gone out of fashion is suddenly rediscovered. This happens when our conscious development has reached a higher level from which the poet can tell us something new. It was always

present in his work but was hidden in a symbol, and only a renewal of a spirit permits us to read its meaning. [...] Experiences of this kind should make us cautious [...] But works that are openly symbolic do not require this subtle approach; their pregnant language cries out at us that they mean more than they say. (Jung, pp.76-77)

I have argued that the language of “Rhapsody on a Windy Night” is pregnant with such symbolism, and that the poem as a whole depicts some kind of ritual, with modern and ancient contending for possession of the rhapsode’s *psyche*. Whether the ritualism of the poem is read in terms of fertility myth or gender neurosis, the images are not random, symbolically or symptomatically. The poem deserves to be seen as an important one in Eliot’s oeuvre, not merely as a bit of atmospheric free verse. And this example of the night-walking flâneur merits himself a more prominent place in Eliot’s cast of characters than he has hitherto been afforded, taking on as he does (even if in a trance) the task that Prufrock has refused. To use Jung’s words again,

The normal man can follow the general trend without injury to himself, but the man who takes to the back streets and alleys because he cannot endure the broad highway will be the first to discover the psychic elements that are waiting to play their part in the life of the collective. Here, the artist’s relative lack of adaptation turns out to his advantage; it enables him to follow his own yearnings far from the beaten path, and to discover what it is that would meet the unconscious needs of his age. (Jung, p.83)

Chapter Four

“One inevitable cross”:

Martyrdom.

Upon those stifling August nights
 I know he used to walk the streets
 Now following the lines of lights
 Or diving into dark retreats

 Or following the lines of lights
 And knowing well to what they lead
 To one inevitable cross
 Whereon our souls are pinned and bleed.¹

4.1. Introduction.

I have argued in the previous chapter that “Rhapsody on a Windy Night” is of considerable importance in Eliot’s early poetry, bringing together as it does a number of key concerns - namely, the role of the flâneur/quester character, the employment of a mythic structure, and issues of gender anxiety (in this case considered in relation both to psychoanalytic approaches and to the notion of a context of feminised literature such as *The Woman in White*). This chapter will examine the development of those concerns in the subsequent poems, from 1911 to 1920, which lead up to *The Waste Land*. In these poems, the flâneur’s destiny of martyrdom - especially in a form of sexual martyrdom, and viewed in both pagan and Christian terms - comes to the fore, the “lines of lights” leading to the “one inevitable cross”. The esotericism of some preceding poems, which has been rendered in terms of mystic, atmospheric backdrops against which are set solitary, male characters, is in some later examples replaced by - in others, compounded by - a *literary* esotericism which continues the treatment of pre-existing mythic concerns. Social settings are more in evidence again, and this renewed emphasis on the public rather than the private experience (or, at least, on the private *within* the public experience) is often heightened by an employment of third-person narration and its ostensibly wider visual scope. Themes

¹ “The Little Passion”; *IOTMH*, p.57.

of gender division and ambiguity come to the forefront. It will be suggested that these developments reach a particularly complex integration in the sexual and literary sado-masochism of “Burbank with a Baedeker: Bleistein with a Cigar”, a poem which might be viewed, technically and thematically, as a shorthand plan for *The Waste Land*.

4.2. “An Agony in The Garret”.

It is noteworthy that the poems Eliot wrote at the same time and just after “Rhapsody” in 1911 were the last he would write for at least three years² - and he suppressed most of these. Nor, as will be seen, was he happy with the initial efforts after this gap. The remaining poems of 1911 (with the exception of “La Figlia Che Piange”, to which I shall turn shortly) are really quite similar in style and imagery to “Rhapsody”, and would seem to confirm that a kind of mythic quest is the chief concern of that poem.

“The Little Passion”, which I have quoted above, is subtitled “From ‘An Agony in the Garret’”, which was, according to John T. Mayer, to have been a sequence of fourteen poems, “fourteen stations of a modern, diminished Way of the Cross”, which would have included “Rhapsody” and the four “Preludes” from the “Prufrock” volume³. The title “The Little Passion” recalls the ironic play upon “Convictions” discussed in section 2.3. The character described initially takes to the streets not so much because of their own allure but rather because of the stifling heat inside. Once in the outside world, he is torn between “following the lines of lights / Or diving in to dark retreats”. The distinction between the public and the private is not a clear one here - the lines of lights may run through busy or empty streets, and the dark retreats may hold the promise of human company in bars, or, as Mayer notes, may “recall the earlier garret and its gloomy privacy [and] can also be taken in the religious sense of retreat” (Mayer, p.77). (And if the dark retreats *are* bars, the experience may still be a solitary one, as in “Interlude: in a Bar”, where “the walls

² Marja Palmer, *Men and Women in T. S. Eliot's Early Poetry* (Lund: Lund University Press, 1996), p.76.

³ “*The Waste Land* and Eliot's Poetry Notebook”, in *T. S. Eliot: The Modernist in History*, ed. Ronald Bush (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), pp.67-90 (p.88n).

fling back the scattered streams / Of life that seems / Visionary, and yet hard; / Immediate and far; / But hard ... / Broken and scarred / Like dirty broken fingernails / Tapping the bar” (February 1911; *IOTMH*, p.51).) Like Prufrock, the character in “The Little Passion” seems unsure whether refuge lies in the public or the private sphere. The indefinite opposition of these two lines (3-4) is either resolved or compounded by what may be either a repetition or a progression in the second stanza: “Or following the lines of lights / and knowing well to what they lead / To one inevitable cross / whereon our souls are pinned and bleed”. The combination of the hypnotic lights and the word “pinned” (rather than “nailed”) seems an echo of the butterfly-collecting imagery found in “Prufrock” (“And when I am formulated, sprawling on a pin / When I am pinned and wriggling on the wall” (*ECP*, p.15)) as well as that of the helpless moth drawn to a gas light which is the subject of “The Burnt Dancer” (1914; *IOTMH*, pp.62-63).

The last two lines (7-8) once again raise the question of the private and the public: “*one* inevitable cross / Whereon *our* souls are pinned and bleed”. Here, the two realms are superimposed, and it is not clear whether this combination is to be viewed in itself as consolatory or as even more repugnant. But what the poem as a whole does suggest is that the private quest and the public sacrifice, the esoteric and the exoteric, may not be, and perhaps should not be, extricable from one another. Indeed, a preference for the idea of public martyrdom as opposed to some private kind is offered in “He said: this universe is very clever” (March 1911, *IOTMH*, p.71), mainly, it appears, as a distraction from boredom:

He said: this universe is very clever
 The scientists have laid it out on paper
 Each atom goes on working out its law, and never
 Can cut an unintentioned caper.

He said: it is a geometric net
 And in the middle, like a syphilitic spider
 The absolute sits waiting, till we get
 All tangled up and end ourselves inside her.

He said: “this crucifixion was dramatic
 He had not passed his life in officechairs
 They did not crucify him in an attic
 Up six abysmal flights of broken stairs”.

He said I am put together with a pot and scissors
 Out of old clippings
 No one took the trouble to make an article.

Regarding the third stanza, the topsy-turvy confusion of hell, purgatory and earthly paradise in the phrase “up six abysmal flights of broken stairs” simultaneously gestures towards and ironises possible Christian significance: in contrast to the “dramatic” crucifixion we may infer another character here who has also ascended, not to heaven, but rather to an attic, a place where no-one wishes to end up and few actually do (this second attribute perhaps to be understood as an ironic parallel rather than an ironic contrast).

The toying with ideas of martyrdom here places a dramatic/mythic concept of the universe in a typically early-Eliot context: the poem peters out into the common concern of the inadequacy and possible inauthenticity of poetic/cultural traditions (“old clippings”), and is ranged against the familiar enemies of mechanical/scientific outlooks (the physics of the first stanza) and the threat of the female predator which compliments or proceeds from this (in stanza two). The ghastly characterisation of the female as a spinning spider is quite pertinent to a consideration of Eliot’s final poem before his three year hiatus, “La Figlia Che Piange”.

4.3. “La Figlia Che Piange” and an entangled tradition.

“La Figlia Che Piange” (*ECP*, p.36) holds a special, indeed rather odd, place in Eliot criticism. Edgell Rickword considered it “the most easily appreciated of Mr Eliot’s poems”⁴, while Ezra Pound hailed it as “an adequate confutation” of the complaint “that Eliot is lacking in emotion”⁵. The apparently straightforward language and lyrical form has resulted in criticism tending to concern itself with the intriguing story of the poem’s supposed origin, and speculation as to the real-life inspiration for the character of the girl (see Palmer, pp.76-78). I note this not to criticise such a tendency to vagueness, but rather to emphasise how uncalculating,

⁴ “The Modern Poet” (1925) in *T. S. Eliot: ‘Prufrock’, ‘Gerontion’, Ash Wednesday and Other Shorter Poems; A Selection of Critical Essays*, ed. B. C. Southam (London: Macmillan, 1978) pp.61-70, p.62.

⁵ Review of *Prufrock and Other Observations*, *Poetry*, 10 (1917), repr. in Southam (1978), pp.55-59 (p.57).

how “un-Eliotic” the poem has appeared to critics. And if the terms “genuine”, “sincere”, “authentic” and “heartfelt” may be in one sense of limited, even questionable value to a critic of this or any other poem, in another sense they are very real and significant issues within this poem. There is a heightened self-consciousness to “La Figlia Che Piange”; both the speaker and the “love” poem itself seem pre-occupied with their own sincerity and authenticity. And while the vocabulary of the poem is certainly simple and fairly conversational, the grammar alone renders its basic narrative meaning exceedingly murky.

Upon first inspection, though, only the Italian title and the Latin epigraph (“O quam te memorem virgo . . .”) may appear “difficult”. I shall discuss these shortly, but first the narrative demands some attention.

Stand on the highest pavement of the stair—
 Lean on a garden urn—
 Weave, weave the sunlight in your hair—
 Clasp your flowers to you with a pained surprise—
 Fling them to the ground and turn
 With a fugitive resentment in your eyes:
 But weave, weave the sunlight in your hair.

The first stanza is “stagy” both in terms of the exhortatory voice - internal or external monologue? - and the stylised pose of the girl against the urn. Lines 4-6 suggest melodrama, while the repeated urging to “weave, weave the sunlight in your hair” make what is, strictly, a physically fanciful demand. So far, the staginess of the opening, whilst very obvious, has not necessarily appeared to count for much in strict narrative terms - the narrator is merely describing the scene in this style for what must be his own good reasons. But the second stanza appears to undermine this, emphasising - over the melodramatic - the illusionistic aspect of theatre:

So I would have had him leave,
 So I would have had her stand and grieve,
 So he would have left.

The conditional “would have” leaves us uncertain as to whether the scene ever took place and/or whether the girl ever existed outside the narrator’s own imagination. Here also, the intrusion of “he” makes ambivalent the narrator’s own position - is he the “he” described, or a separate stage director watching the (non-existent?) couple?

Additionally, the inoffensive “so” becomes troublesome - does it mean “therefore” or “in this way”? Or “in *this* way (as opposed to another way)”? We are not even given an explanation for the motives behind the action of the “he” and “she” in question, and the fact that in this (second) stanza it is the man who turns (“leaves”) allows for a retrospective re-gendering of the first stanza - what if it is the *man* rather than the woman who has woven the sunlight in his hair, and flung the flowers he was about to give her to the ground? One could say that this *seems* less likely, but one cannot give any good reason why this might not equally be the case.

The final stanza twists the narrative once more: “She turned away” ... So she *did* exist, after all? Or has the narrator’s initial hypothesis become a flight of fancy? Then, there is the alternative to the many possible variations on the theme of lost love suggested by the narrative: “And I wonder how they should have been together! / I should have lost a gesture and a pose”. The key words here are “how” and “should” (twice). The possible meanings for the first line include “And I wonder what they would have been like together”, “And I think about how they *ought* to have been together”, and “And I wonder, *in what way* ought they to have been together”; meanwhile, the second could mean “I would have lost a gesture and a pose” or “I ought to have foregone a gesture and a pose (in order to facilitate their being together)”. This is all quite ambiguous, so that when we are offered the afterthought of the closing two lines, “Sometimes these cogitations still amaze / The troubled midnight and the noon’s repose”, we are entitled to ask “precisely *which* cogitations?” and “*whose* midnight?”, “*whose* noon’s repose?”.

So although in one respect the delivery of the poem’s language is fluent, conversational and “easy”, at the same time it is not clear exactly who or what is being described, or what conclusions we should (or even *can*) draw from the piece. It has a very precisely indeterminate quality, and is, with regard to grammatical narrative meaning, impenetrable. The remaining options, therefore, include considering the poem’s symbolism and giving some attention after all to the “difficult” title and epigraph.

Grover Smith gleaned the following information:

While Eliot was travelling in Europe in 1911 he visited a stele [commemorative stone tablet] designated, according to a friend who

suggested that he look at it, “La Figlia Che Piange” (young girl weeping). For some reason, when he searched for this tablet, he was unable to find it. The subject of his resultant lines being nameless, he understandably, in reprinting the poem used as an epigraph the phrase from Aeneas’ address to Venus: “Maiden, by what name shall I know you?” (*Aeneid* i 327). The girl depicted on the grave-monument should presumably be visualized as a conventionally sculptured libation bearer in a posture of sorrow. This much being clear, it is nonetheless probable that in the imaginative drama of the poem the girl is real; it is difficult to see here any trace of the original inception.⁶

While Smith’s information is valuable, some of his interpretations are questionable. For a start, Eliot’s epigraph slightly alters Virgil’s original from “O - quam te memorem virgo?” to “O quam te memorem virgo . . .”. As I hope to show later in this chapter with regard to “Burbank”, this misquoting is not simply a mistake or an irrelevance; rather, the suspension marks point up the linguistic uncertainties inherent in the original Latin and, as I have already tried to show, in the English of Eliot’s poem. For the unpunctuated Latin words can mean, for instance, (1) “what I should call you, Maiden”; (2) “How I might call you to mind, Maiden”; or (3) “How much I might remember you, Maiden”. These are rather different meanings, and each one relevant to a particular concern or strategy of the narrative. Thus: in (1) the question of the identity of the female protagonist, biographical or symbolic; in (2) the question of commemorative or reconstructive approaches - in life or art, memory or imagination - to incidents/characters (in life or art, memory or imagination); and in (3) the question of the accuracy or sufficiency of a particular mental or artistic commemoration or reconstruction of a subject, “real” or imagined. So the altered epigraph gives a clue, in form and meaning, to the poem’s subsequent problems with linguistic ambiguity and the question of what is real or imaginary - Smith’s suggestion that it is “probable that in the imaginative drama of the poem the girl is real” is either meaningless or merits caution.

So far, so uncertain, but the epigraph does, finally, offer us one concrete fact - that it is what was referred to earlier in this study as an “art association”, as distinct from a “life association”, and that in this respect the female is compared or contrasted with Venus. We have also been informed that the title, in addition to its simple

⁶ T. S. Eliot’s *Poetry and Plays: A Study in Sources* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1956), p.27.

linguistic meaning, may be linked to a particular artistic representation. A way into the poem may possibly be attained, then, by thinking in terms of reconstruction by art association - whether the thing being reconstructed is “real” or “imagined” I leave for the moment. One might suggest here two possible significant associations with regard to the poem, both of them from Victorian literature, and both of which are relevant to Eliot’s depiction of gender. The first is Tennyson’s *Maud*, VI. ll.22-30, where the narrator becomes afraid,

What if with her sunny hair,
And smile as sunny as cold,
She meant to weave me a snare
Of some coquettish deceit,
Cleopatra-like of old
To entangle me when we met,
To have her lion roll in a silken net
And fawn at a victor’s feet.⁷

In Tennyson’s poem, the above stanza is followed by one where the narrator modifies his tone briefly to give Maud the benefit of the doubt, before reverting to suspicion. The dynamic of *Maud* derives from our uncertainty about the narrator’s sanity - and consequently his reliability - at the various points in his “monodrama”. In Eliot’s poem, such an allusion has contradictory effects. Firstly, it confers authenticity by precedence, functioning as a pre-emptive attack by the narrator or poet on the character of the female protagonist. It is also a kind of revenge on the female for another male narrator’s possibly mad imaginings. And the question of sanity is particularly relevant here as one contemplates the mania implicit in ascribing a deceitful mind to what may be (in Eliot’s poem) a mindless or non-existent object. We may find a further parallel with regard to this in the mad woman Anne Catherick in *The Woman in White*.

That “La Figlia Che Piange” is a grave monument, and that the epigraph may be translated as “By what name should I know you, Maiden?” matches the part of Collins’s plot wherein Anne dies and it is pretended instead that Laura Fairlie is dead. Laura is locked up in a mental institution as “Anne”, while Anne is buried in the

⁷ Alfred, Lord Tennyson, *In Memoriam, Maud and other Poems*, ed. John D. Jump (London: J. M. Dent, 1974), p.161.

Fairlie family grave, with Laura's name subsequently carved on it. The latter part of the novel is devoted to the efforts of Walter and Marian to prove that Laura is not dead. With regard to the false inscription, Walter vows that "that lie shall be publicly erased from the tombstone" (*WIW*, p.465). That Collins's novel was in Eliot's mind when he wrote "La Figlia" may be supported by Smith's observation that "She turned away, but with the autumn weather / Compelled my imagination many days" seems strongly to echo a passage from the novel where Walter is about to leave Limmeridge House, and is on the verge of saying goodbye to his beloved Laura - engaged unwillingly to another man - and Marian. Laura has already "turned away suddenly and hurried from the room"; after some comforting words, so does Marian: "She left the room. I turned away towards the window, where nothing faced me but the lonely autumn landscape - I turned away to master myself before I, too, left the room in my turn, and left it for ever" (*WIW*, p.148; Smith, p.306n). The turning away in this scene is an act prompted by despair rather than betrayal, and one that female *and* male, Laura and Walter (and even Marian) must perform. In "La Figlia" Eliot has a narrator who wills (or provokes) only the woman to turn, an alteration designed to substitute for the male a position of security in the place of an insecure one. Ironically, such coldness is licensed by a female in *The Woman in White*, when Marian first breaks the news of the engagement to Walter. The masculine woman takes charge of the passive, emotional Walter, thus:

Her large black eyes were rooted on me, watching the white change on my face, which I felt, and which she saw.

'Crush it!' she said. 'Here, where you first saw her, crush it! Don't shrink under it like a woman. Tear it out; trample it under foot like a man!'

The suppressed vehemence with which she spoke, the strength which her will - concentrated in the look she fixed on me, and in the hold on my arm that she had not yet relinquished - communicated to mine, steadied me. We both waited for a minute in silence. At the end of that time I had justified her generous faith in my manhood - I had, outwardly at least, recovered my self-control.

'Are you yourself again?'

(*WIW*, p.96)

Marian's urging, kindly meant, partly confirms Walter's unmanliness, identifying her clearly as possessor of superior "masculine" reason and self-control. Eliot extends this crushing of emotion to a sadistic extreme, wherein the narrator's repudiation of

his own feelings becomes an attack on the woman's (hypothetical) ones. In both texts, the man is prey to his own emotions, and while the main action (real or imagined) of "La Figlia Che Piange" ostensibly allows the narrator to step back from any personal involvement, the overall effect of this allusion to *The Woman in White*, in conjunction with the earlier one from *Maud*, might be understood as of weakening Eliot's narrator still further by association, rather in the manner of Prufrock's "unintentional" allusion to 'Tis Pity She's a Whore (see section 1.5). The manipulative narrator becomes himself manipulated by literary memory.

It is not only in the conditional and indeterminate grammar of its narrative that "La Figlia" may be termed a fantasy, but also in its dated employment of a very Victorian female character. In her passivity, she has very little in common with Nancy Ellicott, also to be found in the *Prufrock* volume, who

smoked
And danced all the modern dances;
And her aunts were not quite sure how they felt about it,
But they knew that it was modern.

("Cousin Nancy"; *ECP*, p.32)

or with the predatory Volupine and Grishkin of the 1920 poems (*ECP*, pp.42-43, 55-56). As well as cruelty, there appears to be regretful nostalgia in "La Figlia", an ambiguity partly explicable by reference to the varying and highly important symbolism of women's hair in Victorian literature. Elisabeth Gitter explains, "when the powerful woman of the Victorian imagination was an angel, her shining hair was an aureole or bower; when she was demonic, it was a web, or noose"⁸. Eliot's poem seems to offer both poles of significance: the angel (probably) for the reader, the demon (and/or the angel) for the narrator. The weaving of sunlight in her hair does not have the unmistakably sinister implications of the parallel instance in *The Waste Land*, where

A woman drew her long black hair out tight
And fiddled whisper music on those strings
And bats with baby faces in the violet light
Whistled and beat their wings
And crawled head downward down a blackened wall

(*ECP*, pp.77-78).

⁸ "The Power of Women's Hair in the Victorian Imagination", *PMLA*, 99: 5 (1984), 936-53 (p.936).

And even if one does fix upon the image of the “web”, Gitter points out that even this is ambiguous; weaving symbolises deceit, rightly enough, but also “the power to weave the family web, to create the fabric of peaceful family and social existence” (Gitter, p.936). It is the possibility of just such an existence that the narrator steps back from (unless he is already married).

The ambiguous significance of the woman is not just the result of her Victorian provenance, as she evokes also Pygmalion’s statue and Dante’s Beatrice. The former was brought to life by Venus for Pygmalion, who had sculpted her, to take as his wife⁹; in Eliot’s poem, the bringing of a statue to life appears to be mainly for the purpose of betraying or deserting her, having more in common with *Frankenstein* than with Pygmalion’s happy marriage. And in the case of Beatrice, her turning away from Dante is a necessary but loving moment at the eternal fountain in heaven¹⁰. Once again, Eliot’s narrator suffers by either association.

So it may be argued that for all the uncertainty and ambiguity conjured by the poem, “La Figlia Che Piange” is, in essence, nostalgic. The woman may indeed be interpreted as an Arachne¹¹ figure, “victim and predator, trapped and trapper, Penelope and Circe, angel and mermaid” (Gitter, p.938), but the two interwoven strands are simplistically and manageably good and evil, and the latter extreme at least suggests the former as a real possibility. The narrator is a true devil’s advocate, his cynicism seemingly designed to provoke the reader (and the narrator himself, eventually) into accepting the woman as a sympathetic, even saintly figure.

Marja Palmer identifies two roles between which the male speaker of “La Figlia Che Piange” and other of Eliot’s poems is divided: “one of voyeuristic contemplation, the aesthetic role, and the other connected with suffering in woman and a sense of guilt in a man, the ethical role”. She also observes that “Eliot’s poetry seems at times to suggest that pain and suffering constitute a positive force, even something vaguely enviable - a quality notably reserved for women” (Palmer, pp.98,

⁹ Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, transl. by Mary M. Innes (London: Penguin, 1955), Book X, pp.231-32.

¹⁰ Dante Alighieri, *The Divine Comedy*, Vol. 3: *Paradiso*, with transl. by John D. Sinclair (London and New York: Oxford University Press, 1939), Canto 31, ll.91-93, pp.450-51: “and she, so far as it seemed, smiled and looked at me, then turned again to the eternal fount”.

¹¹ Arachne was an expert weaver, whose boasting on this matter prompted Juno to turn her into a spider.

92). In the poetry that Eliot started writing again in 1914, this association of “positive” suffering with women informs depictions of the male saints Sebastian and Narcissus, in which are also combined even more tellingly the aesthetic and ethical roles Palmer defines.

4.4. Saints Narcissus and Sebastian; gendering martyrdom.

Two poems refer explicitly in their titles to these figures, namely “The Love Song of Saint Sebastian” (1914; *IOTMH*, pp.78-79) and “The Death of Saint Narcissus” (1915; *PWIEY*, pp.34-35), though they may also be detected in the characterisation and symbolism of other Eliot poems, even before the 1911-14 hiatus, and there are complications within the two “named” poems themselves, as the use of historical myth is so fluid and licentious that it becomes hard to say which poem deserves which title. The barest summaries of the background myths and the “resultant” poems are as follows. Sebastian was a Roman Christian who was to be executed by a firing squad of archers. Lyndall Gordon notes that though the arrows pieced his flesh, he did not die but was rescued by a woman and nursed in her lodgings¹²; he was later “properly” martyred. The poem, though, consists (apparently) of a monologue in which Sebastian fantasises sitting at the foot of an unnamed woman’s stair, flogging himself till he bleeds (“torture and delight”), and then being taken in by the woman, whom he would later strangle as “proof” of his love. As for Narcissus, he was a Bishop of Jerusalem in the second century, who went into the desert as a hermit. Paul Murphy explains that he was reputed to have been accused of committing “an unspecified, but ‘detestable crime’, which might be conjectured to be homosexuality”¹³; in the equivalent poem, Narcissus does indeed go into the desert and, terrorised by a hyper-awareness of his own body and by recollections of previous incarnations as tree, fish, young girl and old man, dances “on the hot sand / Until the arrows came”. At the end of the poem he is dead, “green, dry and stained / With the shadow in his mouth”.

¹² *Eliot’s Early Years* (Oxford and London: Oxford University Press, 1977), p.61.

¹³ “A Study in the Suicide of Selfhood: T. S. Eliot’s ‘The Death of Saint Narcissus’”, *Essays in Poetics*, 17: 2 (1992), 33-42 (p.33).

The poems clearly deviate from their respective saint-myths, the most obvious discrepancy being that it is Narcissus, not Sebastian, who is here filled with arrows. In his letters, Eliot made plain the importance to him of the Saint Sebastian image. Writing to Conrad Aiken on 19th July 1914, he remarked:

There are three great *St. Sebastians* (so far as I know):

- 1) Mantegna (ca d'Oro) [Venice]
- 2) Antonello of Messina (Bergamo)
- 3) Memling (Brussels) ¹⁴

And referring to Mantegna's Sebastian, he told Sydney Schiff some years later that here was "a painter for whom I have a particular admiration - there is none who appeals to me more strongly" (24th March 1920; *Letters* 1, p.376). A few days after the first letter to Aiken, he wrote again, enclosing "The Love Song" and trying to explain his choice of subject and title:

The S. Sebastian title I feel almost sure of; I have studied S. Sebastians - why should anyone paint a beautiful youth and stick him full of *pins* (or arrows) unless he felt a little as the hero of my verse? *Only there's nothing homosexual about this* - rather an important difference perhaps - but no one ever painted a female Sebastian, did they?

(25th July 1914, *Letters* 1, p.44; my italics)

Eliot's odd reference to "pins" may evoke voodoo dolls; it may also point us back to the pinning in "Prufrock" and "The Little Passion". The second emphasis I have made is of an ambiguous statement. Does Eliot mean by "there's nothing homosexual about this" that his poem does not have homosexual overtones (nor, indeed, any explicit reference to Sebastian), or that Saint Sebastian being male and not female is significant, but not with any homosexual implications? Saint Sebastian has indeed, as Murphy notes, "evolved into a primary homo-erotic symbol", and his conversion to Christianity and resultant martyrdom "have been transmuted into both a homo-erotic parable, and a sado-masochistic ritual" (Murphy, p.33). Sebastian's sado-masochism, presumably, may be to do with his being martyred twice (the first time being a misfortune, and the second deliberate, no doubt - though this is hardly to understand the nature and purpose of martyrdom); coyness tends to prevent critics and writers

¹⁴ *The Letters of T. S. Eliot*, Vol. 1: 1898-1922, ed. Valerie Eliot (London: Faber and Faber, 1988), pp.41-42.

making plain exactly what they find “homo-erotic” about the image, but it can be taken to refer to the (Cupid’s?) arrows “phallic” penetration of his body, symbolically rendering him female or passively homosexual. This might provide the other aspect of the “sado-masochistic” tag, in that if we are to understand the arrows as “phallic” as well as “sharp”, their rape of a martyr’s body could be said to carry increased implications of abasement by the transgression of sexual norms if that body is male rather than female.

In any case, Ricks describes just such an appeal in the Saint Sebastian image among writers in the late-nineteenth and early twentieth centuries (*IOTMH*, pp.267-69). And, even if disclaiming any homosexual symbolism, Eliot does acknowledge the postulated sado-masochistic dimension by his attaching his title to a narrative of prayer and sexual violence; as I have said, there is no explicit link to the historical Sebastian story - though it could refer (in a heavily altered way) to the episode half-way through it, where he is rescued and healed by the woman. Critics have viewed the poem harshly - stripped of its sanctifying title, it may appear merely gross and sadistic, and its *faux naïf* style, which it shares with “The Death of Saint Narcissus”, speaks of adolescence rather than the latter’s more convincing primitivism¹⁵. The narrative also seems obscure, with the bleeding Sebastian taken in by the woman in the first stanza “because I should be dead”, while at the end of the concluding stanza it is she who is dead, murdered by him. It is actually possible to read the first half of the poem as spoken by Sebastian and the second by the ministering woman who then strangles *him*, but the poem still appears muddled and half-formed. Ted Hughes may put it best when he ascribes to it a subsidiary role to “The Death of Saint Narcissus”, one where it “serves, rather, like an aborted twin, to intensify the survivor’s uniqueness”¹⁶. Still, if “The Love Song” was an overall failure, Eliot had nevertheless fixed upon the compelling image of Saint Sebastian himself. His point about no-one painting a female Sebastian is indeed relevant, for this image of a male martyr does seem to appropriate (or be invested with) the kind of “female” suffering

¹⁵ For instance, in the clumsy “You would love me because I should have strangled you / And because of my infamy ; / And I should love you because I had mangled you / And you were no longer beautiful / To anyone but me”; *IOTMH*, pp.78-79).

¹⁶ “A Dancer to God: A Toast to T. S. Eliot”, in *A Dancer to God: Tributes to T. S. Eliot* (London: Faber and Faber, 1992), pp.17-47 (p.33).

that Palmer suggested the poet prizes in “La Figlia Che Piange”. And under the disguise of “The Death of Saint Narcissus”, Sebastian’s androgyny or ambisexuality - as well as the manner of his death - is utilised with more confident purpose, the character of the woman being integrated, here, into the character of the male saint. Here is the poem, which, as I shall discuss, is not actually the 1915 original draft (it was not printed), but the subtly modified published version:

Come under the shadow of this gray rock—
 Come in under the shadow of this gray rock,
 And I will show you something different from either
 Your shadow sprawling over the sand at daybreak, or
 Your shadow leaping before the fire against the red rock:
 I will show you his bloody cloth and limbs
 And the gray shadow on his lips.

He walked once between the sea and the high cliffs
 When the wind made him aware of his limbs smoothly
 passing each other
 And of his arms crossed over his breast.
 When he walked over the meadows
 He was stifled and soothed by his own rhythm.
 By the river
 His eyes were aware of the pointed corners of his eyes
 And his hands were aware of the pointed tips of his fingers.

Struck down by such knowledge
 He could not live men’s ways, but became a dancer before
 God
 If he walked in city streets
 He seemed to tread on faces, convulsive thighs and knees.
 So he came out under the rock.

First he was sure that he had been a tree,
 Twisting its branches among each other
 And tangling its roots among each other.

Then he knew that he had been a fish
 With slippery white belly held tight in his own fingers,
 Writhing in his own clutch, his ancient beauty
 Caught fast in the pink tips of his new beauty.

Then he had been a young girl
 Caught in the woods by a drunken old man
 Knowing at the end the taste of his own whiteness
 The horror of his own smoothness,
 And he felt drunken and old.

So he became a dancer to God.
 Because his flesh was in love with the burning arrows
 He danced on the hot sand
 Until the arrows came.
 As he embraced them his white skin surrendered itself to
 the redness of blood, and satisfied him.
 Now he is green, dry and stained
 With the shadow in his mouth.

Several features of the poem are worth noting here: the invocation in the desert at the beginning, which will find a slightly altered form in the first part of *The Waste Land*; the hyper-sensual narcissistic awareness of the second stanza; in the third, the question of what “such knowledge” and “men’s ways” may be, and the act of treading on faces and limbs; in the subsequent stanzas, a series of metamorphoses - tree, fish, and young girl caught by old man; and in the final stanza, the explicitly masochistic Sebastian-style martyrdom. Once again, we can see this amounts to something rather more than and different from the known facts of the historical saint’s life. Martin Scofield detects similar faults to those generally found in its sibling poem, namely “more of the Narcissus than of the saint [...], more perversity than sanctity”. He also finds, in this “strangely grotesque and ambivalent presentation”, that “the various ‘metamorphoses’ do not really help to explain it, or even to show any kind of poetic logic” ¹⁷. Certainly, just as the martyrdom of the “Saint” here appears most obviously to be based on the historical Sebastian, so the “Narcissus” seems to have more to do with the figure of Greek myth than the historical bishop.

In Ovid’s *Metamorphoses*, Narcissus was a beautiful youth who infatuated both young women and young men, and particularly the nymph Echo. Cursed by the ever-vindictive Juno for her talkativeness, Echo was thereafter only able to speak the last words of what others said, so that in reply to Narcissus’s shouted queries (“who are you?”, “Where are you?”, etc.), she could only answer back with similar questions. Baked of her love, she subsequently faded away as a physical entity, living on only as secondary sounds. Having scorned the love of anyone else, Narcissus subsequently became hypnotised by his own reflection in a pool, and, unable to touch the object of his desire, pined away, transformed upon his death into

¹⁷ T. S. Eliot: *The Poems* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), pp.44-45.

the narcissus flower (*Metamorphoses*, III, pp.83-87). Significantly, according to Ovid it was the retelling of this story particularly that brought fame to the seer Tiresias, to whom we will return in discussion of *The Waste Land*.

It is the second stanza of Eliot's poem which evokes most obviously Ovid's Narcissus. We might note that the mythical Narcissus - like the historical one, if Murphy's (admittedly tenuous) speculations are correct - shares similar connotations of homo-eroticism and homosexuality as Saint Sebastian. Hughes summarises the other "signals" given off by the name: "the drowned self, the female, disembodied crying voice [...] but at the same time [...] primarily that aspect of the image as a mirrored reflection" (Hughes, p.35). Before giving further consideration to Hughes very interesting interpretation, the approaches of some other critics merit attention.

Rainer Emig gives a helpful explanation of the Freudian view of narcissism. In this psychoanalytic system the narcissist's apparent self love has four forms, namely (1) what he himself is; (2) what he himself was; (3) what he himself would like to be; and (4) someone who was once a part of himself. According to Emig,

Freud implies clearly that the narcissist does not love his transformations, but always one particular stage in this metamorphosis. Narcissism is therefore essentially ahistorical and entails the reification of the self by itself.¹⁸

This may assist us in understanding the connections between narcissism and the metamorphoses that Eliot's hero undergoes; we might, then, look in the poem particularly for one who was once part of himself, and for what Narcissus would like to be that he is not, and also try to identify the "one particular stage" of metamorphosis that he might love.

To Christine Froula, the answer to all three riddles would be clear. In a reading of *The Waste Land* as an articulation of repressed homosexuality, she mentions the alteration of the "Death of Saint Narcissus" to be found in the *Waste Land* manuscripts into the version reproduced above which was later put in *Poems Written in Early Youth*¹⁹. For Froula (p.168), the most significant change is from "hers" to "his" in the penultimate stanza, with the original reading thus:

¹⁸ *Modernism in Poetry: Motivations, Structures and Limits* (London: Longman, 1995), p.187.

¹⁹ Froula, "Eliot's Grail Quest, or, the Lover, the Police, and *The Waste Land*", *Yale Review*, 78: 2 (1989), 235-53, repr. in *T. S. Eliot* (Longman Critical Readers), ed. Harriet Davidson (Harlow:

Then he *wished* he had been a young girl
 Caught in the woods by a drunken old man
 To have known at the last moment, the full
 taste of *her* own whiteness
 The horror of *her* own smoothness.

(*TWLfacts*, p.93; my italics)

This is a simple but telling observation; in this original version, Narcissus would become completely the girl, to be aware of *herself*, whereas in the later, official version, Narcissus-the girl is still aware of *himself*. We should perhaps also note here how Eliot's Narcissus originally "*wished* he had been" (this applies to all of his incarnations); later on, he simply "had been", with no say in the matter. So, in comparison with the first version, the second at one level subtly disengages Narcissus from his own experience; his changes now enact his destiny, more so than his desire. For Froula, the change from "her" to "his" underlines "the fact that the law or line Narcissus crosses is the line of sexual difference [...] he would become the violated woman" (Froula, p.179). Froula argues that the poem recoils from its own desire, so that "as Kurtz's horror restores his moral stature in Marlow's eyes, Narcissus's 'horror' of his own transsexualised body pays tribute to the Police [i.e. conservative codes of sexuality] and redeems his transgressions" (Froula, p.168).

Emig's and Froula's insights may bring us to focus, principally, upon gender concerns and the figure of the young girl raped in the woods by the old man. Tony Pinkney, too, comments upon this encounter, placing it in the context of the anti-Romantic classicism I have been discussing: "'Saint Narcissus" is almost a parody of classicist self-possession: far from being menaced with absorption by his world, he is locked in a solipsistic enclosure, 'stifled and soothed by his own rhythm'"²⁰. Pinkney argues that Eliot's poem remodels Pound's "A Girl" (in which the girl becomes a tree) and T. E. Hulme's "Conversion" (Pinkney, pp.68-73; Gordon, p.62, notes this latter resemblance). In Hulme's poem, the convert (to something like Wilde's aestheticism) has been "stifled" by "beauty like a scented cloth", asphyxiated by "loveliness that is her own eunuch", and at the end of the poem the convert is passing

Longman, 1999), pp.166-87; Eliot, *The Waste Land: A Facsimile and Transcript of the Original Drafts* (*TWLfacts*), ed. Valerie Eliot (London: Faber and Faber, 1971), pp.90-93.

²⁰ *Women in the Poetry of T. S. Eliot: A Psychoanalytic Approach* (London and Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1984), p.72.

into death “ignominiously, in a sack, without sound / As any peeping Turk to the Bosphorous”²¹.

Pinkney views Eliot’s reworking here as an *attack* on Pound’s and Hulme’s Classicism, with his own poem emphasising “the psychic cost of their rejection of areas of subjectivity that they identify as ‘female’ in the name of their cult of tight-lipped *machismo*” (Pinkney, p73). So Pinkney identifies broadly the same concerns as Froula, except that where he locates a subversion of “macho” norms, she identifies a surrender by Eliot to those norms. Gordon would appear to see the same end result as Froula, except that she in turn views this as a success: “the strength of Eliot’s analysis lies in the implied anti-Romantic need to curtail the self and its narcissism and to find a reliable external authority”; for Gordon, Saint Narcissus’s principal sin is “self-regard” (Gordon, p.92).

Ted Hughes’s discussion of “The Death of Saint Narcissus” is notable for the extremely high estimation of it as an individual poem, and the rank he accords it within Eliot’s work. He points to its incongruous position in *Poems Written in Early Youth* (*highly* incongruous, we may feel, in that the original version is written well after “Prufrock” and a number of other early “mature” poems, and the final official version must date from after *The Waste Land*):

The poem does stand very oddly alone, in an odd position, at the threshold of the *Collected Poems* yet not within. Outside the mature work, there is nothing remotely like it – except the fantasia of St Sebastian [...]. Yet within the *Collected Poems*, almost every poem, certainly every major poem, seems related to it in some uterine fashion. (Hughes, p.33)

The contents of *Inventions of the March Hare* may allow us, now, to question whether “outside the mature work, there is nothing remotely like it”, but certainly the poem is striking in its religious primitivism. Here, where what Gordon “misses most is the individual contemporary note of “Prufrock” (Gordon, p.63), Hughes celebrates its ahistoricism. For him, it is “the first portrait, perhaps the only full-face portrait, of Eliot’s genius” (Hughes, p63). In his interpretation, the figure of Narcissus, “superficially” a disguised Saint Sebastian, in reality represents something (everything) much greater. Focusing on the series of metamorphoses, and detecting in

²¹ Hulme, “Conversion”, *Imagist Poetry*, ed. Peter Jones (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1972), p.18.

them a similar implication of evolutionary stages as Robert Crawford (Crawford, p.66), Hughes identifies the re-enactment of an archetypal creation myth: Narcissus is

Some form of Eros/Dionysus, the androgynous, protean daemon of biological existence and the reproductive cycle. [...] The poem openly reclaims the sanctity of biological and primitive feeling, and fuses it with a covert, Loyolan variant of the life and death of Christ. (Hughes, p.36)

So, for Hughes, Narcissus stands not simply as a martyr but as the dying and reborn god himself, and the character's androgyny and narcissism are viewed as symbolic of, respectively, his divine wholeness and his being made incarnate within his own creation (that is, able to look at, and be looked at by, himself outside of himself). Hughes's reading of the poem is lengthy and merits inspection in its entirety; while not viewing the figure as problematic in the way that other critics tend to, his argument is nevertheless sophisticated. What all critics seem to agree is that a question mark hangs over "The Death of Saint Narcissus" with regard to its being withheld from publication. Erik Svarny claims that it was one of the three poems that Pound was referring to, in a letter to Harriet Monroe in August 1915, as "jems" (sic) he had received from Eliot for publication²². This contrasts with Gordon's impression that Eliot thought the poem unlikely to be to Pound's taste: she refers to a letter to Pound six months earlier, where, himself referring to "Mr Apollinax" and "The Death of Saint Narcissus", Eliot wrote, "I understand that Priapism, Narcissism etc are not approved of" (Gordon, p.69). whether the poem's fate owed itself to Pound's misgivings or Eliot's own is therefore unclear; that misgivings existed is, as I have said, without question, and the source of speculation. The uncertainty as to their precise nature may be partly clarified by considering some other possible allusive sources for the poem: sources, the very act of whose employment may be seen to be one of the poem's central narcissistic problems.

I have three allusive sources in mind: Percy Shelley's dramatic poem *Charles the First*, Thomas De Quincey's *Confessions of an English Opium-Eater*, and Christopher Marlowe's "Hero and Leander". Each example can be usefully related to

²² Svarny, *'The Men of 1914': T. S. Eliot and Early Modernism* (Milton Keynes and Philadelphia: Open University Press, 1988), p.69; Pound, *The Selected Letters of Ezra Pound 1907-1941*, ed. D. D. Paige (London: Faber and Faber, 1982), p.62.

an important strand of Eliot's poem. Shelley's Archbishop provides a link with Eliot's Bishop of Jerusalem; De Quincey's nightmares offer parallels with Narcissus's metamorphoses; and Marlowe's Leander is surely the basis for Eliot's physical description of Narcissus as an object of desire, with Marlowe additionally making an explicit comparison between his protagonist and the Narcissus of myth. I will discuss them in sequence. In the first and third examples, I have italicised those words or lines that seem to me especially to have verbal as well as thematic echoes in Eliot's poem; the parallels with the second are more thematic than verbal. Here is the first example, a description in *Charles the First* where the Second Citizen likens the Archbishop of Canterbury to a pope:

London will be soon his Rome: *he walks*
As if he trod upon the heads of men.
 He looks *elate, drunken with blood and gold;*
 Beside him moves the Babylonian woman
 Invisibly, and *with her as with his shadow,*
 Mitred adulterer! He is joined in sin
 Which turns Heaven's milk of mercy to revenge.²³

The Shelley source is problematical, due to the possibly ambivalent attitudes of Eliot in making such an allusion and of Shelley himself in offering the description in the first place. In this historical poem, Shelley is, as one might expect, making a republican argument, but in accordance with the context of the republicanism of the seventeenth rather than the nineteenth century, so that pro-clericalism is opposed not with his own atheism but with a form of anti-clerical Protestantism; hence the likening of the Archbishop to a pope. Accordingly, the implication of straightforward sectarianism hangs uncomfortably over the passage, in addition to the misogyny of the Whore of Babylon reference. As for Eliot's attitude to it, the line "London will soon be his Rome" might have carried personal implications at a time when he was settling in England and, as critics have observed, appears to have been pre-occupied with religion and seriously debating some form of conversion to some form of Christianity other than the Unitarianism of his American upbringing (see, e.g., Scofield, pp.44-45). We may recall from earlier in this study that Eliot eventually

²³ Sc. i. 58-64, *Complete Works of Percy Bysshe Shelley* (10 vols), Vol IV: *Poems* (London: Ernest Benn, 1965).

came to state his cultural-political allegiances as comprising classicism, Royalism and Anglo-Catholicism (section 2.1), intimately binding together artistic, national and religious identity. For all Eliot's disparagement of "Protestantism", the term "Anglo-Catholic" allowed, in Eliot's case, for an extremely elastic idea of Christian culture that could stretch conceptually from the New England Protestantism of Hawthorne to Dante's Italian Catholicism, from "New" England to the European one. In these interrelated senses, London was indeed to become Eliot's Rome.

Despite Eliot's profound cultural opposition to Shelley, and his well-known view that the Civil War which terminated Charles the First's reign was the main contributory factor to a catastrophic dissociation of sensibility in the English mind, the self-imposed exile of his Narcissus is in accord with an attitude posited in Charles the First (as well as the historical story of Bishop Narcissus): that spiritual enlightenment is not likely to be found within the societal institution of the church (but rather, here, in mystic isolation). This Saint Narcissus has some of the makings of a lone romantic hero. But where the Archbishop's treading on *heads* merely exemplifies his tyrannical nature, Narcissus's treading on "faces, convulsive thighs and knees" is ambiguous, in that it could suggest more literally a recoiling from walking upon his own reflection (in the puddles of the city streets, presumably, hence the escape to the dry desert where no such reflection is likely). In cutting himself off from society, Narcissus cuts himself off literally and figuratively from his reflection in other people, and from the damaging of that reflection.. It is notable that Narcissus finds in the desert a mood of destructive mystic rapture not dissimilar to that already possessed in the city by the Archbishop in Shelley's almost exultant description: "He looks elate, drunken with blood and gold"; "Knowing at the end the taste of his own whiteness / The horror of his own smoothness / and he felt drunken and old", and "his white skin surrendered itself to / the redness of blood, and satisfied him". "The Death of Saint Narcissus" marks Eliot's first serious acknowledgement in his poetry of the dangers of self-deception that adhere to esoteric mysticism, as well as, at a time of personal desire to cleave to larger cultural institutions, the dangers of individual isolation. Thus his motives do indeed appear to mix vanity and religious sincerity. As Gordon notes, "the well known dangers of gazing into the mirror of

election are pride and despair” (Gordon, p.92). Similar, perhaps, the dangers of breaking that mirror; in this sense, a closer parallel in Shelley’s work might be with *Alastor*. In any case, if Eliot is alluding to Shelley, the motives and intended effect of such an allusion seem ambiguous.

The second passage, from De Quincey’s *Confessions*, describes a series of increasingly frightening nightmares, whose origin he attributes to a strange encounter with a fellow opium-eater, a Malay:

In China, over and above what it has in common with the rest of Southern Asia, I am terrified by the modes of life, by the manners, by the barrier of abhorrence placed between myself and *them*, by counter-sympathies deeper than I can analyse. I could sooner live with lunatics, with vermin, with crocodiles or snakes. All this, and much more than I can say, the reader must enter into before he can comprehend the unimaginable horror which these dreams of oriental imagery impressed upon me. Under the connecting feeling of tropical heat and vertical sunlights, I brought together all birds, beasts, reptiles, all trees and plants, usages and appearances that are found in all tropical regions, and assembled them together in China or Hindostan. From kindred feelings, I soon brought Egypt and her gods under the same law. I was stared at, hooted at, grinned at, chattered at, by monkeys, by parrots, by cockatoos. I ran into pagodas, and was fixed for centuries at the summit, or in secret rooms; I was the idol; I was the priest; I was worshipped; I was sacrificed. I fled from the wrath of Brama through all the forests of Asia; Vishnu hated me; Seeva lay in wait for me. I came suddenly upon Isis and Osiris: I had done a deed, they said, which the ibis and the crocodile trembled at. Thousands of years I lived and was buried in stone coffins, with mummies and sphinxes, in narrow chambers at the heart of eternal pyramids. I was kissed, with cancerous kisses by crocodiles, and was laid, confounded with all unutterable abortions, amongst reeds and Nilotic mud.²⁴

De Quincey’s hallucinated metamorphoses, or, more strictly, incarnations, parallel those of Eliot’s protagonist in exemplifying of the narcissistic and uncontrollable state of a mind caught in an endlessly connected series of myths. Here we have Jung’s Collective Unconscious running riot in the mind of one man. At first they are under a degree of control (“I brought together all birds, beasts, reptiles, all trees and plants [...] and assembled them together”), though initiating from a self-admittedly arbitrary tendency of association. Subsequently, the creative imagination becomes the passive object of its own creation (“I was stared at, hooted at, grinned at”), a reversal which provokes the kind of unease experienced by the night-walker as

²⁴ *Confessions of an English Opium-Eater* (1821-22) (London: Penguin, 1997), p.241.

a result of his visions of the street in “Rhapsody on a Windy Night”. These expressions of derision have their origin in a passage a few pages earlier in *Confessions*, where “the tyranny of the human face” manifests itself in images again reminiscent of Saint Narcissus’s treading on faces: “the sea was paved with innumerable faces; faces imploring, wrathful, despairing; faces that surged upwards by thousands, by myriads, by generations; infinite was my agitation” (*Confessions*, p.239). The end result of all this is a narcissistic closed circuit in which the dreamer is his own eternal victim and creator: “I was the idol; I was the priest; I was worshipped; I was sacrificed . Eliot was to posit a very similar reflexive mysticism in unused lines from the *Waste Land* manuscripts :

I am the Resurrection and the Life
 I am the things that stay and those that flow.
 I am the husband and the wife
 And the victim and the sacrificial knife
 I am the fire and the butter also.

(*TWLfacts*, p.111)

Eliot’s lines here pile on top of each other: references to Christianity in the first line, the contrasting philosophies of Zeno and Heraclitus in the second, and Bhuddism and Hinduism in the last, aiming at an archetypal mythic vision, one that is rendered in the form of simple narcissistic oppositions, which might be taken to lend weight to Hughes’s argument that Narcissus need not be viewed as simply self-destructive and perverse: mystic insight, according to such a system of divine reality, would by definition be narcissistic in a way that would not be neurotic but simply a reflection of reality ... if one were indeed a god, that is. De Quincey’s opium-eater falls at this hurdle, hounded by a succession of other gods, so that the incarnation laid “amongst reeds and Nilotic mud” is evidently unclear as to whether it is Moses or monster. As a whole, De Quincey’s account stands as a warning to Eliot’s hero of the insane as well as the divine aspects that might pertain to a totalised understanding of reality.

From the final example, “Hero and Leander”²⁵, I have in mind particularly the following description of Leander:

²⁵ *Christopher Marlowe: The Poems*, ed. Millar Maclure (London: Methuen, 1968), pp.5-41.

Jove might have sipped out nectar from his hand.
 Even as delicious meat is to the *taste*,
 So was his neck in touching, and surpassed
 The *white* of Pelop's shoulder. I could tell ye
 How *smooth* his *breast* was, and how *white* his *belly*,
 And whose immortal *fingers* did imprint
 That heavenly path, with many a curious dint,
 That runs along his back; but my rude pen
 Can hardly blazon forth the loves of men,
 Much less of powerful gods; let it suffice
 That my slack muse sings of Leander's eyes,
 Those orient cheeks and lips, *exceeding his*
That leapt into the water for a kiss
Of his own shadow, and despising many
Died ere he could enjoy the love of any.

(ll.62-76)

This example provides, I take it, the strongest verbal similarities with Eliot's poem, particularly with regard to the description of Narcissus's incarnations as fish and girl. And, as I have said, in the latter part of this description Marlowe himself makes an explicit comparison with Narcissus. If - recalling Emig's definitions of the narcissist's desires - Leander is that which Narcissus would wish to be, then Eliot obliges him.

"Hero and Leander" in itself may be described as a narcissistic poem in two main senses. In the first place, it has a curious relationship with Shakespeare's "Venus and Adonis" (a poem of central relevance to the discussion of *The Waste Land* in the next chapter): both were completed around the same time (1592-93), and in addition to their Ovidian subject matter, each poem seems to bear the marks of the other's influence, so that it is possible, though not certain, that the two writers were familiar with each other's work in progress²⁶. Irrespective of this, Marlowe's poem constructs Hero and Leander's story and characters by reference to numerous other characters from classical myth in a device of mock-heroic, allusive digression, so that the poem seems to attempt to condense more of Ovid's *Metamorphoses* into it than is really necessary - indeed, this narrative exuberance may seem to be the central feature of the poem. Leander particularly is placed in a context of stories of beautiful youths - often amorously pursued by gods - such as the aforementioned Narcissus, Adonis,

²⁶ Here are some examples: "Venus and Adonis" l.3 ("Hero and Leander" l.93); 11-12 (45-50); 35-36 (737-40); 67-68 (773-75); 108 (748); 209-10 (234-36); 637-38 (816-19).

Ganymede and Cypariuss, and he is unsuccessfully courted by Neptune just as he himself courts (initially unsuccessfully) Hero. Thus, just as in the passage quoted he is described in homoerotic and feminised terms, so in relation to other characters he occupies alternately “male” and “female” positions, though obviously the romance with Hero is the primary focus of interest. In the absence of a Hero or a Neptune, though, Saint Narcissus can only replicate Leander’s alternating gender relationships *within himself*, so that he becomes branches and roots twisting among each other, and a fish struggling in his own fingers. The successive incarnations may be viewed both as attempts to escape and to satisfy - again, as Emig defined it in its entirety - “what he himself is; what he himself was; what he himself would like to be; someone who was part of himself”.

It is in these terms that we might best characterise the allusive relationship of Eliot’s poem to the sources proposed, sources which themselves appear to be fixed within just such a system; writing a poem about a narcissist, Eliot adopts or finds himself adopted by texts which in turn have an anxious narcissistic conception of the relationships between texts. Which is another way of saying that the poem and its allusive method are more uncertain of themselves than usual, here. Murphy is half-right, I think, when he concludes:

As Saint Narcissus is driven onwards, compelled by beauty, he cannot guess that this internal vision of beauty shall lead only to death, to the abyss, and not the nature of this sadomasochistic artwork, which revels in the excess of sexual and sensual feeling without giving the final satisfaction of fulfilment, a kind of closure on itself, which is forever deflected or avoided.
(Murphy, p.30)

I agree that the poem can be seen as a sadomasochistic artwork, in form as well as, obviously, in content, but would suggest that it is also in terms of its relationship to other artworks: ambivalent in themselves, these sources will not yield up satisfactory bases as to how an allusion how an allusion to them would help envisage Eliot’s own Narcissus. The critical conflict as to whether the poem is classical or romantic is understandable, because the allusive strategy here suggests Eliot himself was unclear.

Where I disagree with Murphy is with regard to the idea that Narcissus cannot guess the end. The end we are provided with is not necessarily the natural culmination of the poem’s events, but rather a conscious and admittedly drastic form

of closure. Discussing *The Waste Land*'s poet, Froula provides an interesting insight with regard to Saint Narcissus:

the poet's wish to be like the swallow hides a deeper wish to be like Philomela [who was turned into a nightingale]: like Saint Narcissus, he would become the violated woman. This wish must complicate his quest, for he cannot resemble at once Narcissus and Parsifal: he cannot become the violated woman, as Narcissus would do, and violate woman, as Parsifal does.
(Froula, p.179)

Thus a symbolic gender distinction is implied between quester (male) and martyr (female). Saint Narcissus escapes his never-ending quest through his incarnations by choosing the "female" martyrdom prized in "La Figlia Che Piange". In this sense he is no longer narcissistic, no longer Narcissus, husband *and* wife, victim *and* knife, but simply wife and victim. The character of Sebastian does not perhaps, then, merely offer a disguise for Narcissus so much as his only possible end in a poem whose central anxiety seems to be how to make an end of itself, how to cut itself off from the reflections that cruelly constitute it.

It remains to fully follow through the poem's implications with regard to its apparent allusive model of narcissistic relationships: is allusion functioning as Narcissus's mirror here, simply reflecting identical images back and forth endlessly? And if so, how does one reconcile this with the principle of a gendered relationship between Eliot's poetry and past texts according to which this study has been proceeding? These questions, and the figure of Saint Narcissus, are very important, but, as such, it must be requested that the final words on Saint Narcissus are, in Murphy's words, "deflected or avoided" until the very end of this study. Suffice it here to remind the reader that, somewhat in keeping with narcissistic requirements of the character who has been under discussion, a very important mythical character has been neglected, to whom proper acknowledgement must in due time be made.

4.5. Poems 1916-1920.

As if in deliberate contrast to the problematical figure of Saint Narcissus, Eliot's immediately subsequent use of mythical themes and figures in "Aunt Helen" (1915; *ECP*, p.31) and Mr Apollinax (1916; *ECP*, p.33) is lighter and more detached in tone. Genesis Jones provides an ingenious but convincing argument that the

former poem is a satire closely based upon the Book of *Revelation*: thus, for instance, the four angels who attend upon virgins are parodied by maiden Aunt Helen's four servants, the dining table corresponds to the altar where the Eucharist is prepared, and "seated upon it, like the beast and harlot on the Church, are the footman and second housemaid"²⁷. Jones characterises Eliot's mythical method as one of deliberate contrast "between the ideal and the real" (Jones, p.291). In "Aunt Helen" this is a fair summary for the piece's comparatively gentle mockery: the footman and the housemaid are, after all, *not* the beast and the harlot, rather "a simple happy couple, released from the terrors of respectability" (Jones, p.292). In fact the contrast is so absurd, so excessive in its minute and detailed reversals, as to suggest a mockery of its own mythical method; one might also reflect that *Revelation* is hardly likely to be the first example one would comfortably reach for when selecting an unambiguous mythic "ideal" to contrast with reality.

The sardonic dig at respectability that is "Aunt Helen" is continued in "Mr Apollinax". Again, the ebullient title character is, as Grover Smith has noted, "mythologized to the point of absurdity" (Smith, p.32). Smith etymologises the name *Apollinax* as "an inexplicable blend of celestial Apollo and cthonic Apollyon (Smith, p.32-33): such a conflation in fact epitomises the confused feelings the character gives rise to in his American hosts. The narrator compounds the confusion with a parody of agreeable raconteurism: "I thought of Fragilion, that shy figure among the birch trees / And of Priapus in the shrubbery / Gaping at the lady in the swing" (ll.3-5). He surely did *not* think of Fragilion, an invented name, whose nevertheless deft feminine characterisation hardly makes him an obvious parallel to the phallic Priapus. The mythological carnival turns briefly sinister with the evocative reference to "coral islands / Where worried bodies of drowned men drift down in the green silence" (ll.10-11), before careering merrily onwards and out of the poem, leaving the punningly-named "dowager Mrs Phlaccus" and her other guests quite prostrated. In both poems, mythical allusion steam-rolls baffled reality: the subtextual joke in each

²⁷ *Approach to the Purpose: A Study of the Poetry of T. S. Eliot* (London: Hodder and Staughton, 1964), pp.291-293 (p.292).

case may be whether such a mythic subtext is even necessary for - let alone comprehensible to - these subjects.

“Ode (on Independence Day, July 4th 1918)” (*IOTMH*, p.383) is more serious, rehearsing the theme of martyrdom from “Saint Sebastian” and “Saint Narcissus”, though in a contemporary context and an altered form. The poem consists of three stanzas, each prefixed with one word: respectively “Tired”, “Tortured”, and “Tortuous”. The stanzas are quite obscure, the tone consistently subdued. Starting with what appears to be a suggestion of the exhaustion of myth (“silence from the sacred wood / And bubbling of the uninspired / Mephitic river”; ll.2-4), the poem proceeds to a tableau depicting the aftermath of a married couple’s first sexual union:

Tortured.

When the bridegroom smoothed his hair
There was blood upon the bed.
Morning was already late.
Children singing in the orchard
(Io Hymen, Hymenæe)
Succuba eviscerate.

Here, the ritual “sacrifice” of virginity is pictured almost as an act of murder, or even of the staking of a female vampire: a “succuba eviscerate” - the cold Latinate phrase suggestive of the scientific classification of species - would be a female demon who has sexual intercourse with sleeping men, and who has had her insides torn out. The sadism and disgust are reminiscent of “The Love Song of Saint Sebastian”, the scene a thematic extension also of “La Figlia Che Piange” (“And I wonder how they should have been together ...”). The final stanza extends this cruelty even into nihilism, with a sarcastic allusion to the myth of Perseus and Andromeda, where the rescue of the latter causes a “fooled resentment” in the dragon, who has, it is implied, not been cheated of quite such a prize as he imagines. The poem’s ending is ambiguous, and could refer either to the dragon or to Perseus: “Indignant / At the cheap extinction of his taking off. / Now lies he there / Tip to tip washed beneath Charles’ Wagon” (ll.8-14). These last lines are reminiscent of the final ones in “The Death of Saint Narcissus”, and the ambiguity as to their subject is apt, in that Perseus is (implicitly) monstrous, either in his treatment of Andromeda or

by his association with her. This is another example of the morbid visualisation of male-female relationships in terms of martyrdom or ritual sacrifice, and of the hampering of the solitary male quest by such relationships (“Misunderstood / The accents of the now retired / Profession of the calamus”; ll.5-7).

The final poem for consideration in this chapter is “Burbank with a Baedeker: Bleistein with a Cigar” (1919; *ECP*, pp.42-43), a piece controversial mainly for its lengthy bric-à-brac epigraph and the anti-Semitic tone of the description of the character Bleistein. Its slippery allusive style has aroused considerable discussion as to the target (or targets) of its satire, and indeed as to whether it should be considered a satire at all. In an account of a mere thirty two lines, we appear to be presented with, alternatively or in combination, mediations on money, culture, race and sex. To these concerns I would like to add those of martyrdom and masochism.

Starting with the title, we are offered two characters, and two objects “with” which they are associated – no verb is provided. Robert Crawford has offered as a parallel to Eliot’s Burbank a historical one:

Luther Burbank was a plant breeder over whom there was considerable controversy around 1910 and beyond. Fêted far beyond his native state of California, which celebrated ‘Burbank Day’ in his honour, Burbank was a much discussed figure, seen by some as a pseudo scientist, but hailed by the Nation as ‘the most ingenious and successful of all hybridizers.’ As creators of such oddities as the ‘white blackberry’ and the ‘plumcot’, Burbank was part of a world threatened by a ‘Melange Adultère de Tout’. (Crawford, p.65)

Crawford does not intimate whether Burbank’s delicate hybridisation is threatened by this “adulterous mix of everything” or a part of the threat itself, but suggests that the theme of the poem may be “the hybridization of the human plant ‘Chicago Semite Viennese’” (Crawford, p.66). We may also note the aptness of the name *Burbank*: a “burr bank” would be a seed repository, a source of vegetative growth. As for the trademark of Eliot’s Burbank, B. C. Southam sums up Baedekers as “guide books [...] famed and joked about for their potted entries which enable the tourist to inform himself in the space of a few lines on matters cultural, historical, geographical, etc., as some American tourists do, not always sneered at, in the novels of James”²⁸. With

²⁸ *A Student’s Guide to the Selected Poems of T. S. Eliot*, 6th edn (London, Faber and Faber, 1994), p.83.

regard to Burbank's counterpart, Bleistein is a Jewish name meaning "Leadstone", which Antony Julius suggests is Eliot's reversal of the name Goldstein²⁹, though Southam identifies it as the real name of a furrier in Upper Thames Street in London near where Eliot once worked (Southam, p.83). Bleistein's accompanying symbol contrasts him with Burbank's earnest seeking after culture: sometimes a cigar is both a phallic symbol and a symbol of wealth. So the title alone gives hints towards the themes of culture, sex, and money, with a probable attitude of antipathy towards "Leadstone" with his cigar, and a possible one of irony or mockery towards Burbank.

The title is followed by an epigraph composed of phrases from literature, connected or separated by dashes and commas, thus:

Tra-la-la-la-la-la-la — nil nisi divinum stabile est; caetera fumus — the gondola stopped, the old palace was there, how charming its gray and pink — goats and monkeys, with such hair too! — so the countess passed on until she came through the little park, where Niobe presented her with a cabinet, and so departed.

As is commonly noted, all but one of the quoted fragment are from works in some way related to Venice, variously by Theophile Gautier, Mantegna, Henry James, Shakespeare, Robert Browning, and John Marston. The last quote, the final stage direction from a masque by Marston (Southam, p.86), is the outsider, though this need not be viewed as an error, since the Countess's journey through the park prefigures the journey through the Venice of the poem itself by those who are outsiders themselves, especially Princess Volupine's triumphant progress. The effect of the epigraph, with its mixture of languages and abrupt juxtapositions, is by turns confusing, enigmatic, and, in the case of "goats and monkeys, with such hair too", comic. As with Eliot's "Notes on the Waste Land" (see Chapter Five), it has attracted almost as much comment as the poem to which it is attached. Erik Svarny's very interesting discussion here seems to confuse two different interpretations: having argued that "once we have grasped that each consistent quotation (except the last) refers to Venice, their interrelation must be regarded as opportunist rather than essential", he continues:

²⁹ T. S. Eliot, *Anti-Semitism, and Literary Form* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), p.17

When stating that the purpose of the epigraph to 'Burbank' is not elucidatory, we imply that one important element in the epigraph's aesthetic effect cannot be dissociated from its very impenetrability: that effect is to leave the reader disorientated, outside the poem, unable to use the epigraph to naturalise the poem's concerns by reference to his own concerns and experience and thus, unable to make the empathetic leap [...] to project his own vitality into the text. (Svarny, p.151)

Both points may be valid but they do not necessarily bear each other out: if the epigraph does distance the reader, this does not necessarily mean that it is "opportunistic rather than essential". As will be argued in the next chapter with regard to the "Notes on the Waste Land", the quotes may perfectly well mean something whilst deliberately resisting easy interpretation. Svarny enlists the support of Gabriel Pearson, who comments on Eliot's poetry of this period in general, "traditional forms no longer compose an inherited order. They themselves become manifestations of despair and anxiety, because no longer credited and sanctioned"³⁰. I question the qualifier "no longer" here, as well as the overemphasis of "anxiety and despair". "Tradition and the Individual Talent" proceeds from the understanding that the Tradition can not be inherited but only attained (see Chapter One), but there is no reason for supposing that its non-inheritable nature is a feature new to Eliot's era. Eliot is not simply fragmenting an ordered past here: one characteristic of a number of the quotations in the epigraph is that they derive from works of art *in which art itself* is obscured by, prostrated before, or rendered a mere backdrop to civic celebration or the pursuit of material wealth, of social status, or of other people³¹. Although, admittedly, the interpretative anxiety with regard to associationism *was* a particularly modern issue, the problems of an audience's, a patron's, or a society's commodification and exploitation and of art are ancient ones. The motivating attitudes behind such obscurantism in the epigraph might be identified as the cultural

³⁰ "T. S. Eliot: An American Use of Symbolism", in *Eliot in Perspective*, ed. Graham Martin (London: Macmillan, 1970), pp.83-102 (p.88).

³¹ I have in mind the narrator's pursuit of the poet's life story instead of his art in James's *The Aspern Papers*, the employment - indeed the whole purpose - of Marston's masque as a backdrop for social exhibitionism, and the pseudo-connoisseurism of the chatterers at Galuppi's recital in Browning's poem: "oh, they praised you, I dare say! / 'Brave Galuppi! That was music! Good alike at grave and gay! / I can always leave off talking, when I hear a master play.' // Then they left you for their pleasure ..." ("A Toccata of Galluppi's" ll.25-28, see below).

anger and defensiveness of the artist, but that is not always the same as cultural “anxiety and despair”.

In fact, consultation with the sources for the epigraph makes the themes under discussion, if not immediately clear as a whole, then at least individually identifiable. The line from Gautier which commences it is itself followed in the original by the question “Qui ne connaît pas ce motif?”, which means “who does not know this motif?”. It is the theme tune of the Venice Carnival, and prompts a dreamy reminiscence of the place, though we could bear in mind that “motif” also means “motive”³². The Latin quote that follows means “nothing is stable unless divine: the rest is smoke”, and can be found on a scroll around a dying candle in the Mantegna *Saint Sebastian* which Eliot so revered, and which he had seen at its home in Venice. The third quote is from James’s *The Aspern Papers*, in which an American goes to Venice in search of the private papers of a dead Romantic poet, only to be thwarted, partly accidentally, by the two women who hold them. The narrator’s friend, Mrs Prest, warns him, slightly unfairly, about the women: “they’ll lead you to your ruin ... They’ll get all your money without showing you a scrap”³³. The quote itself is slightly altered from ““How charming! It’s grey and pink!” my companions explained” (James, p.7), a description of the palace to which the narrator’s quest brings him. Jones expresses himself baffled as to why Eliot made the change (Jones, p.295), but the effect is fairly clear, in that the prosaic original is rendered more poetic: “How charming! It’s grey and pink!” / “How charming its grey and pink” - it is a similar tendency to over-idealise that afflicts the narrator of *The Aspern Papers* himself. Next, the comic-grotesque “goats and monkeys, with such hair too” elides Othello’s fulmination against his wife’s (falsely presumed) adulterous lust³⁴ with “Dear dead women, with such hair too” from Browning’s “A Toccata of Galluppi’s”³⁵, a poem abundant with thematic parallels for “Burbank”, best summarised in lines 40-42:

³² “Sur Les Lagunes”, *Émaux et Camées* (Enamels and Cameos; 1852) (Paris: Jacques Madelaine, 1938), p.18.

³³ *The Aspern Papers* (1888) (London: Penguin, 1994), p.37.

³⁴ “as prime as goats, as hot as monkeys”, *Othello* III. iii. 409.

³⁵ *Poems of Robert Browning* (London: Oxford University Press, 1912), pp.18-20.

As for Venice and its people, merely born to bloom and drop,
 Here on earth they bore their fruitage, mirth and folly were the crop:
 What of soul was left, I wonder, when the kissing had to stop.

The final quote - from Marston - may suggest, as I have stated above, a blithe proceeding through the previous jungle of voices, and a safe departure which leaves the poem open for the arrival of Burbank and Princess Volupine. The Venetian associations invoked by the sources - pattern and motivation (Gautier), permanence, divinity and suffering (Mantegna), greed and false idealisation (James), women's lust and dead women (Shakespeare and Browning) - all these are evident in the main body of the poem. From these themes, Jones identifies one unifying theme in the epigraph, namely:

the cycle of growth and decay concreted in historic Venice. The first citation reflects a long history of moral decadence. The second, on the other hand, represents a religious "death in love", the sort of death that can revitalise and resurrect Venetian life. The third returns to the theme of decadence: dilapidated romanticism, febrile and grim behind its decaying mask. The fourth and fifth are a fusion of two instances of the breakdown of erotic passion. (Jones, p.296)

This analysis seems to me particularly insightful and useful. Following on, Jones suggests that the epigraph may be viewed as the background myth for the whole poem, "a sort of modern version of the Vegetation Cults" (Jones, p.296). (At this point, one may merely reflect, why Saint Sebastian particularly, rather than, say, Adonis, as male counterpart to Venus? I shall attempt to explain this in due course.)

The epigraph, then, if at first a little startling in appearance, is not necessarily unhelpful, and certainly not meaningless. Nor is *all* of it fantastically obscure - "A Toccata of Galuppi's" and *Othello* are fairly well known pieces, and a poet can not fairly be accused of elitism for proceeding on the assumption that readers may have read some other works of literature. This, of all things, actually *is* a purely subjective matter, and it is pointless to try and demarcate the exact point where a poet becomes "obscure" or "obvious" - one can merely make the approximate guess that some of the epigraph will seem at least faintly familiar, some utterly obscure. In any event, it might be viewed either as some bizarre Burbankian literary hybrid or as a kind of

Baedeker guide entry for the poem, comprehensive or inane according to one's view³⁶.

The main body of the poem will require several successive approaches to its meaning, although, in contrast to the epigraph, its first stanza offers ostensibly the most straightforward lines in the poem (and, possibly, in all Eliot's work):

Burbank crossed a little bridge,
Descending at a small hotel;
Princess Volupine arrived,
They were together, and he fell.

This has a nursery-rhyme simplicity to it, and yet one possible purpose of the epigraph may now stir a response in the reader: namely, a desire to discern sophisticated meaning in what is put in front of him or her - having, perhaps, been baffled by the complexity of the epigraph, we may feel a combination of relief and puzzlement at the openness of this stanza: is this all? And, in a way, this *will* be seen to be "all" the poem, in terms of action, though there is perhaps more here than meets the eye initially.

The picture quickly muddies, though, as the next two stanzas offer what is either an elaboration of the first or its consequence, stated in terms of mythological and literary reference. "The God Hercules" abandons Burbank like Shakespeare's Anthony before him, and Volupine's "shuttered barge" burning on the water evokes Cleopatra as the female parallel (*Antony and Cleopatra*, IV. iii. 16; I. ii. 199). There follows the introduction of Bleistein, "Chicago Semite Viennese", who is generally taken to be Burbank's successor among Volupine's conquests, though the line "But this, or such, was Bleistein's way:" could either refer to Bleistein's "way" with Volupine, or suggest a parallel to her predatory manner towards Burbank. Bleistein is

³⁶ F. W. Bateson argues: "the 'learning' in Eliot's earlier poems must be seen as an aspect of his Americanism. As scholarship it is wide-ranging, but often superficial and inaccurate. At one level, indeed, the enjoyment that he and Pound found - and successfully communicated to their readers - in exploiting their miscellaneous erudition is the same in kind, if not in degree, that every American pilgrim of our cathedrals, galleries and museums experiences. The appearance of literary scholarship parallels the tourist's apparent acquisition of 'culture'"; "'Burbank'", in *'Prufrock', 'Gerontion', Ash Wednesday and Other Shorter Poems: A Selection of Critical Essays*, ed. B. C. Southam (Basingstoke and London: Macmillan, 1978), pp.182-86 (p.184).

finally succeeded in the poem by Sir Ferdinand Klein, and Burbank is left in bemused or rueful reflection:

Who clipped the lion's wings
And flea'd his rump, and pared his claws?
Thought Burbank, meditating on
Time's ruins, and the seven laws.

One of the chief critical problems of the poem lies in its anti-Semitic portrayal of Bleistein, and Julius has rightly criticised a tendency to ignore, play down, or justify as deliberately ironic this aspect (Julius, pp.98-109). He is correct, I think, in identifying the anti-Semitism as “a clear signal to the reader, bemused by everything else in the poem” (Julius, p.101). Indeed, though one could argue that the description of Bleistein (“A saggy bending of the knees / And elbows, with the palms turned out, / Chicago Semite Viennese”) merely suggests a comic helplessness (perhaps in the face of Volupine's enticements) - although we do not have a comparable physical ridiculing or racial classification of Burbank - and that the “lustreless protrusive eye” that “stares from the protozoic slime” is not necessarily his (or could be Bleistein, but murdered by Volupine and floating in the canal), and that “The Jew is underneath the lot” could be taken as Burbank's thoughts, not the poet's ... it is surely the case that the poem dares the most obvious interpretation in each instance, and is perfectly aware that they will offend. The offence could not possibly be a series of unintended freak ambivalences in the language. This is especially the case with the bald juxtaposition of “The rats are underneath the piles. / The Jew is underneath the lot.”

As Julius argues, the aesthetic, the linguistic and the ethical simply cannot be separated here, not least because, as far as he is concerned, the anti-Semitism is integral to what is “a bravura piece” in which Eliot's economy and skill “achieves [...] what prosy anti-Semites cannot cram into two-volume treatises” (Julius, p.98). Confronted with such a poem, the critic may hesitate between Rick's view that the poem simply fails because in it anti-Semitism is pointedly asserted rather than dramatised (*T. S. Eliot and Prejudice*, p.35), and Julius's, “appalled and impressed” (Julius, p.104), that the poem is wicked partly because it is technically so well done,

so effectively cruel. I can only proceed from the position that the poem is anti-Semitic, and that it is well done, and that still it merits further discussion of its themes, themes which nevertheless may bring us back to its central fault.

4.6. A Little Death in Little Venice.

Julius argues, quite validly, that the name “Sir Ferdinand Klein” describes a Jewish German who has received a knighthood in Britain, and views this as an extension of the characterisation of the Jewish Bleistein (Julius, p.104). There are Jews called “Klein”, but it is a common German name, not specifically Jewish, and its meaning “small” or “little” continues a “motif” that runs more softly through the poem: “she came through the little park”; “a little bridge”; “a small hotel”; “a perspective of Canaletto” (Canaletto is a diminutive name for the painter Antonio Canale, and means literally “a small canal”). As with “Goldfish” (see Chapter Two), “Aunt Helen” and “Mr Apollinax”, we are presented with a diminishing, or diminished, place of action. We return to the synoptical opening stanza:

Burbank crossed a little bridge,
 Descending at a small hotel;
 Princess Volupine arrived,
 They were together, and he fell.

The little bridge in this literal stanza is also a figurative one, a bridge between cultures. But where Luther Burbank “crossed” - that is to say, *combined* - plant species, this Burbank’s crossing is ambivalently a combination of American with European or fully *from America to Europe*. “Descending” - another generative pun: Burbank, like Eliot, is most likely descended from European stock - he finds himself at “a small hotel”, which has several implications here. It may suggest that he does not achieve even the level of cultural transition that James’s unfortunate narrator does (*he* stays in the grey and pink palazzo); that this is perhaps a euphemism for a brothel - his disastrous liaison with Princess Volupine occurs here; and that, again figuratively, his “small hotel” is an equivalent of the deracinated Gerontion’s “decayed house”, which is both a rented physical abode (owned by a Jew) and a family line (*ECP*, p.39). Any kind of crossing by Burbank is doomed or transitory,

converted instead into a downward movement: “he fell”, with its suggestion of orgasm, impotence, or spiritual degradation. This last line is a gender reversal of “They were together and she fell” from Tennyson’s “The Sisters” (Tennyson, p.21), but as Svarny has pointed out, Eliot’s line “is not tonally distinguished to alert the reader to the allusion” (Svarny, p.154), so that it seems an organic part of the stanza. Even if we do recognise the allusion, this is not so much an allusive reversal as an acceleration - where the Earl receives his come-uppance at the end of Tennyson’s story of female revenge, Burbank, rather unfairly by comparison, suffers his fate (at the hands of another aristocrat) immediately. Once again, Eliot depicts a lone male on a quest, who chooses the wrong kind of cultural crossing here and falls victim to a predatory woman (Volupine: “voluptuous”, “vulpine”).

From this single-stanza organism we might clone the poem’s remaining predator-victim encounters: Bleistein looking at a perspective of the wrong kind of little canal (with the accompanying image: a declining candle, the phallic cigar wilting); and Sir Ferdinand, whose surname “Klein” falls into the next stanza to occupy an equivalent position to the earlier “Declines”, of which word his name is a mere “little” echo. There are places called “Little Venice” in cities in the countries these men come from: they find a Venice that is itself merely another “Little Venice”, in which they each suffer, euphemistically or literally, a “little death”. All this suggests itself as the poem’s possible central thematic “motif”, whereas in fact the replication becomes in the case of Bleistein a distortion and finally a demonisation, where he is assigned (as individual or generic “the Jew”) the villain’s place “underneath the lot” that Volupine has hitherto occupied. The original positioning might or might not seem unfair, but at least there is no ambiguous suggestion that Princess Volupine represents all women - she clearly just represents a particular type of woman from a particular social class. This is not clearly the case with “the Jew” Bleistein.

The roots of the transposition of the Jew and Volupine might be traced to another possible literary analogue, whose principal link with “Burbank” is the figure of Saint Sebastian alluded to in the epigraph and in the reference to “the smoky candle end of time” and possibly in the phrase “Money in furs”. This has been taken

to refer to the association of the fur trade with Jews, as well as to the simple fact that the rich dress in fur (Southam, p.90), so that it could refer to Bleistein or to Volupine. But it may also evoke the title of Leopold von Sacher-Masoch's novel *Venus in Furs* (1870), the original study in masochism ³⁷.

In a letter to Emilie Mantaja, Sacher-Masoch described his obsession with "the magnificence of fur", "the epitome of beauty, lust, and cruelty" (Sacher-Masoch, p.16), and his novel explores such an obsession. It is the tale of Severin, recounted to a narrator, and his pursuit of "Mistress Wanda", whom he typifies as a "Northern Venus" - the furs are originally simply to keep her warm. He offers himself as her slave if she will wear the furs and beat him. While Wanda initially resists this, she eventually complies, and Severin accompanies her on her tour of Europe, an especial quantity of space being given over to the tour of Italy and particularly, naturally enough, Venice: the city of Venus. Instead of a *Saint Sebastian* picture, the novel features a painting of *Venus in Furs* as its central image, which Severin persuades Wanda to pose for, and which accompanies them on their travels. By the end of the novel, Wanda's reluctant sadism, roused more by Severin's infuriating pestering than by any violent fantasies of her own, resolves itself into a decisive - and to Severin, of course, cruel - cessation of this power relationship. Comically, the moral Severin draws from the whole affair is a frustratingly simple one, bereft of paradox or perversion: that those who ask to be whipped deserve to be whipped.

Severin tells his story in response to the narrator's explanation of his own fantasies, so that in a sense the novel - masochistically, or perhaps sadistically - questions and rejects Sacher-Masoch's own masochism. The initial discussion makes explicitly the link between masochism and martyrdom (Severin is the first speaker here):

"... everyone knows how closely sexual love and cruelty are related."

"But in my case all these elements are raised to their highest degree,"

I replied.

"In other words, reason has little power over you, and you are by nature, soft, sensual, yielding."

"Were the martyrs also soft and sensual by nature?"

"The martyrs?"

³⁷ *Venus in Furs, and Selected Letters*, transl. by Uwe Moeller and Laura Lindgren (New York: Masquerade, 1993).

“On the contrary, they were *suprasensual* men who found enjoyment in suffering. They sought out the most frightful tortures, even death itself, as others seek joy, and as they were, so am I - *suprasensual*.”

“Take care that in being such you do not become a martyr to love, *the martyr of a woman*.”
(Sacher-Masoch, p.91)

In a letter to Paul Elmer More, Eliot described himself in very similar tones to those used above by the narrator, “I am one whom this sense of the void tends to drive towards asceticism or sensuality” (quoted by Gordon, p.62). It is a Saint Sebastian/Saint Narcissus martyr figure who emblematises these contradictory elements most forcefully for Eliot. In his own martyr poems, as in Sacher-Masoch’s novel, an accompanying female figure is associated, and in both authors both the male and the female are each in some senses sadist *and* masochist.

Burbank could be viewed, then, as yet another of Eliot’s repertoire of suffering Sebastians, and the poem follows the novel in mythical cross-fertilisation by characterising the martyr’s tormentor-victim as a Venus. In “Burbank” she is specifically a Venus Anadyomene rising from the sea, who also perversely, and rather unsteadily, mimics the Beatrice-like girl at the top of the stairs in “La Figlia Che Piange”:

Money in furs. The boatman smiles,
Princess Volupine extends
A meagre, blue-nailed, phthisic hand
To climb the waterstair. Lights, lights,
She entertains Sir Ferdinand

The figure on the waterstair is an example of allusion-as-decay, referring as it does to more lines from Gautier’s poem, respectively ll.15-16: “La Venus de l’Adriatique / Sort de l’eau son corps rose et blanc” (“The Venus of the Adriatic [i.e. Venice] raises her pink and white body from the water”), and ll.23-24: “Devant un facade rose, / Sur le marbre d’un escalier” (“Before a pink facade, on the marble of a stair”). This second pair of lines is the particular subject of a romantic reverie by another Narcissus-Sebastian figure, Dorian Gray: “The whole of Venice was in those two lines. He remembered the autumn that he had passed there, and a wonderful love that had stirred him to mad delightful follies” (*PODG*, pp.180-81). What Eliot puts back

into “those two lines” is less delightful, a sinister and diseased Venus-Volupine. “Lights, lights” evokes Jacobean tragedy, and the smiling boatman - smiles are never pleasant in Eliot’s poetry - may be taken accordingly as a kind of Charon figure, so that Venice becomes an analogue for a kind of Underworld or Hell, an “Unreal City” prototype for the London of *The Waste Land*.

In addition to her being the goddess of love, there are two other aspects of Venus that are particularly placed in opposition to Burbank-Sebastian, namely time and money. Firstly, we recall the phrase on the Mantegna *Saint Sebastian*, “nil nisi divinum stabile est; caetera fumus”: nothing is stable unless divine. Both Burbank’s Baedeker and Bleistein’s cigar (“the smoky candle end of time”) decline when confronted by the real Venice of Venus-Volupine. In “Gerontion” Eliot personifies “History” as a female who

has many cunning passages, contrived corridors
And issues, deceives with whispering ambitions,
Guides us by vanities. Think now
She gives when our attention is distracted
And what she gives, gives with such supple confusions
That the giving famishes the craving. Gives too late
What’s not believed in, or if still believed,
In memory only, reconsidered passion.

(ECP, p.40)

Svarny summarises thus: “history, the secular and temporal, is presented in terms of the Jacobean revenge drama as a cunning courtesan” (Svarny, p.177). This is right, I think, though as Anthony Hands’s study in Eliot’s sources makes clear, the “Gerontion” passage derives not from a representation of History, but from one of Venus, in Sir John Davies’s poem *Orchestra*: “the flattering dame / With divers cunning passages doth erre / Still him respecting that respects not her” (ll.27-28)³⁸. Likewise in “Burbank”, Volupine’s liaison with Burbank is initially described in terms of mythical parallels, but is then followed by a series of similar liaisons which may be viewed either as ritual re-enactment of the myth (of the sacrifice of the Vegetation God “Burr bank”) or as mere historical succession and obsolescence. That it may seem to mean the latter - History rather than myth - might not, though, be the

³⁸ Quoted in *Sources for the Poetry of T. S. Eliot* (Oxford: Hadrian, 1993), pp.27-28.

fault of Venus-Volupine-History (who, if she *is* History, is evidently a victim of herself) so much as of the poem's recoiling from the association of Burbank with Bleistein. The ambiguity of the colon in the poem title becomes clear: instead of allowing an equivalence between the two men, it actually implies Bleistein's following on after Burbank, so that in cold historical terms Burbank has simply been used up in passing.

Secondly, just as the Hercules who abandons Burbank is, according to Southam, the god of sexual virility (Southam, p.88), he is also, according to Robert Graves and Laura Riding, the guardian of money³⁹, and this may be related to another important characteristic of Venus Anadyomene.

In her study of Chaucer's treatment of the figure of Venus Anadyomene, Meg Twycross points out that she is associated with the Latin word "luxuria", which can mean either "lechery" or "luxury" (expensive goods). Indeed, observes Twycross, she is symbolically represented in (that other favourite from Eliot's poetry) the mermaid:

On the mundane or rational plane [...] the Sirens are strange horys, who win a man over with the sweetness of their blandishments, and then, having sucked him dry, throw him away. Their rapacity - for a man's money rather than sex - was a favourite theme of medieval moralists.⁴⁰

This is where Venus in Furs starts turning back into Money in Furs, and Sacher-Masoch's Severin provides just such a parallel to Burbank's "betrayal" by Volupine, in reference to a woman he knew prior to Wanda:

I became the admirer of a respectable woman. She acted the part of irreproachable virtue, only in the end to betray me with a rich Jew. You see, it is because I was betrayed, sold, by a woman who feigned the strictest principles and the highest ideals, that I hate that sort of poetical, sentimental virtue so intensely. (Sacher-Masoch, p.96)

In "Burbank", Eliot similarly rejects the "poetical" possibilities of Venice in favour of emphasising its depravity, whilst additionally denying himself even Severin's distinction between Venus in Furs and Money in Furs. As with "The Love Song of Saint Sebastian" and "The Death of Saint Narcissus", the sado-masochism

³⁹ *A Survey of Modernist Poetry* (London: Heinemann, 1927), p.237.

⁴⁰ *The Medieval Anadyomene: A Study in Chaucer's Mythography* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1972), pp.44-45, p.37.

of the poem turns into something more disturbing, with the arguably valid connection of sexuality and religious martyrdom implicitly replaced as a serious theme by an uglier form of power-relationship. This poem, which exerts supremely competent and ingenious poetic control over its readers and its characters, finally renders itself masochistic by its own sadistic provocations, a poem that asks and probably deserves to be whipped⁴¹. In its allusive hybridisation and thematic structures, however, it suggests possibilities for a more profound treatment of myth and gender, quester and martyr, in Eliot's final major poem of his early period: *The Waste Land*.

⁴¹ We may note how the rhetorical question with which Burbank closes the poem ("Who clipped the lion's wings / And flea'd his rump and pared his claws?") is ambivalent, not just as regards who or what "the lion" is (Burbank? Man? Venice? Time?) but also the nature of the relationship between the lion and this other. Is the other servile towards the lion, or his master? The poem ends on a note of sado-masochistic ambiguity.

Chapter Five

“That Old Classical Drag”: The Waste Land

“That Shakespearian Rag
Most intelligent, very elegant,
That old classical drag,
Has the proper stuff.”¹

I

5.1. Introduction.

My consideration of *The Waste Land* (1922) is chiefly intended to demonstrate the extent of Eliot’s use of myth in the poem, and the significance of the literary means employed for this function. I will argue that Eliot is attempting a kind of ritual re-enactment of myth by means of altering and revivifying previous works of literature that have made use of myth, and that, as in much of his previous poetry, the principal technique he employs in altering these forerunners is to reverse or blur the genders of the mythic protagonists concerned. This raises the question of whether the works are thereby being restored or undermined, a question that is particularly difficult to answer in view of the highly esoteric manner in which Eliot implants both myth and reversal in his poem. The possible significance of using such an esoteric approach as one designed, perhaps, to forestall a total understanding of the poem’s “meaning” will also be discussed. It will additionally, unavoidably, raise the question of how far one can be certain in identifying allusions employed for esoteric purposes. In this chapter I will suggest a number of possible sources for parts of the poem, and these stand open to charges as regards degrees of credibility and relevance. I offer them specifically, however, as a cumulative “body” of circumstantial evidence for the particular themes of myth and identity I am discussing. In any case, the peculiarities of the literary construction of the poem seem to me to demand attention to the allusive method as a primary critical duty here. Finally, it will be my contention that

¹ “That Shakespearian Rag” (1912); see Bruce R. McEldery Jr.’s interpretation of “A Game of Chess”, “Eliot’s ‘Shakespeherian Rag’”, *American Quarterly*, 9 (1957), 185-186, repr. in *A Collection of Critical Essays on The Waste Land*, ed. Jay Martin (New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, 1968), pp.29-30.

at the heart of the poem, in “The Fire Sermon”, lies a re-enactment of a work by Shakespeare, a Shakespearian rag in old classical drag. This occurrence will be suggested as central to the themes of canonicity, myth and gender with which I am concerned, and will be shown to have been prefigured by re-enactments of other related works of literature in “A Game of Chess”.

5.2. The allusive method.

The poem marks the apogee (or nadir, depending upon one’s point of view) of Eliot’s use of the allusive method, a method so pronounced in this poem that speculation as to the significance of many of the allusions has been matched or exceeded by speculation as to why such an extreme method was used in the first place. Fascination is tempered with suspicion, so that wildly opposing motives have been suggested for Eliot’s use of the technique. Conrad Aiken is of the view that

in *The Waste Land*, Mr. Eliot’s sense of the literary past has finally become so overmastering as to almost constitute the motive of the work. It is as if, in conjunction with the Mr. Pound of the *Cantos*, he wanted to make a “literature of literature” - a poetry accentuated not more by life itself than by poetry. [...] This involves a kind of idolatry of literature with which it is a little difficult to sympathize. In positing, as it seems to, that there is nothing left for literature to do but become a parasitic growth on literature, a sort of mistletoe, it involves, I think, a definite astigmatism - a distortion.²

Other critics have argued that this apparent preoccupation with literature rather than life is really a device to hide the highly personal nature of Eliot’s motive and subject matter. Of particular interest here is James E. Miller Jr.’s interpretation³, which reads the poem as an elegy for Eliot’s friend Jean Verdenal, couched in terms of masculine crisis and desire. From another angle, Maud Ellmann’s *The Poetics of Impersonality*, whilst focusing on Eliot’s admission that he had “personal reasons” for his theory of impersonality, concludes that “*The Waste Land* is a sphinx without a secret [...] and to force it to a confession may also be a way of killing it”⁴. The remaining approach so far offered has been to see the poem’s structure and technique

² “An Anatomy of Melancholy”, in Jay Martin, pp. 52-58 (p.54).

³ *T. S. Eliot’s Personal Waste Land: Exorcism of the Demons* (London and Pennsylvania: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1977).

⁴ *The Poetics of Impersonality: T. S. Eliot and Ezra Pound* (Brighton: Harvester, 1987), p.91.

as evidence of laziness, pretentiousness, or proto-postmodernist stacking of random elements.

I shall not be arguing for this last kind of reading. As far as the others are concerned, there is something to be said for each, though I will argue that none of them do full justice to the poem, nor can account for it successfully. I aim to re-examine the notion of the poem as one based on mythic archetypes, with particular regard to Eliot's manipulation of gender identity via literary allusions. This may be seen as complementary to Miller's theory, although the aim will not be a biographical interpretation, much as I believe my own reading would lend itself to such an approach. I will be arguing, in contrast to Ellmann, that this literary sphinx *does* have a secret, though one which is designed not to be easily discovered, and that this very secrecy itself raises new questions as to Eliot's main purpose in writing the poem. My main conjecture will be that in *The Waste Land* Eliot's employment of other literature is intended to effect a kind of ritualisation of the myths involved in his own poem; that the poem itself might be read as a kind of ritual itself, and that the distortion of gender here serves both to encrypt and to subvert the mythic ritual. One reason for this paradoxical motive will be explained as being the precondition for the proper function of this ritual: for it to "work", it must not be fully understood or recognised as working; for it not to be subverted, it must first subvert its own elements.

5.3. Mythical themes of *The Waste Land* (i) A note on "The Notes".

Eliot's preface to his "Notes on the Waste Land" is as follows:

Not only the title, but the plan and a good deal of the incidental symbolism of the poem were suggested by Miss Jessie L. Weston's book on the Grail legend: *From Ritual to Romance* (Cambridge). Indeed, so deeply am I indebted, Miss Weston's book will elucidate the difficulties of the poem much better than my notes can do; and I recommend it (apart from the great interest of the book itself) to any who think such elucidation of the poem worth the trouble. To another work of anthropology I am indebted in general, one which has influenced our generation profoundly; I mean *The Golden Bough*; I have used especially the two volumes *Adonis*, *Attis*, *Osiris*. Anyone who is acquainted with these works will immediately recognize in the poem certain references to vegetation ceremonies. (ECP, p.78)

Prior to any intended application of these remarks, and of the notes as a whole, to the poem, one must acknowledge the many objections raised with regard to them - not least by Eliot himself, who later explained and dismissed their existence as follows:

I had at first intended only to put down all the references for my quotations, with a view to spiking the guns of critics of my earlier poems who had accused me of plagiarism. Then, when it came to print *The Waste Land* as a little book - for the poem on its first appearance in *The Dial* and in *The Criterion* had no notes whatever - it was discovered that the poem was inconveniently short, so I had to expand the notes, in order to provide a few more pages of printed matter, with the result that they became the remarkable exposition of bogus scholarship that is still on view today.⁵

Hugh Kenner is of the opinion that “We shall do well to discard the notes as much as possible; they have bedevilled discussion for decades”⁶, whilst F. L. Lucas’s caustically observes that “A poem that has to be explained in notes is not unlike a picture with “This is a dog” inscribed beneath”⁷. A fair point, and one may justifiably ask if the notes are not an admission of artistic failure on Eliot’s part - if his work of art cannot fully speak for itself, can he be said to have succeeded in his intended effect? It certainly seems at odds with the high modernist ideal of the totalised, self-referential text, in which allusions are fully internalised and synthesised into a new whole.

Kenner bewails the necessity of having to include the Notes - “This incredibly illiterate literary society seems to have been wholly unaware of the methods of Pope” (Kenner, p.129) - but Aiken is more forthright in calling Eliot’s exegesis “pretentious”: “We admit the beauty of the implicational method; but the key to an implication should be in the implication itself, not outside of it. We admit the value of the esoteric pattern; but the pattern should disclose its secret, should not be dependent on a cypher” (Aiken, p.56). And it is undeniably the case that several generations of academics, notably Grover Smith, have found more and more examples of quotation and paraphrasing in the poem, so that the notes could be said to be insufficient or misleading, even if one were to admit a use for them.

⁵ *On Poetry and Poets (OPAP)* (London: Faber and Faber, 1957), p.109.

⁶ *T. S. Eliot: The Invisible Poet* (London: Methuen, 1965), p.129.

⁷ *New Statesman*, 3 Nov 1923, p.116, repr. in *T. S. Eliot: The Waste Land; a Casebook*, ed C. B. Cox and Arnold P. Hinchliffe (London: Macmillan, 1986), pp.5-6 (p.6).

What I would say here, though, is that while I have some sympathy with all these objections to the notes as a satisfactory or necessary explication of the poem, such criticisms of the notes are only valid if it indeed *was* Eliot's intention to explain the poem (I am leaving aside the anti-plagiarism defence here). What I will suggest is that the notes are there in order to be half-understood, to hint at but then to mislead or conceal with regard to the "meaning" of the poem, and that the meaning in question is one which in order to function must not or may not be fully understood, or too easily made available. In a certain formal sense, too, these incomplete and, in some cases, apparently unhelpful or mischievous inclusions (for instance, the chunks of German and Latin quotations - "of great anthropological interest" - the digression about hermit-thrushes and the personal assurance concerning the behaviour of the clock of Saint Mary Woolnoth) may be viewed as mimicking the confusing visual, syntactic and narrative disruptions of the poem itself - if, that is, one does not wish to consider the Notes as a part of "the poem itself".

If, as Aiken wishes, the esoteric pattern were to disclose its secret, it would no longer be esoteric. The secret can only be attained, not distributed like a leaflet. In fact, as Terry Eagleton has argued, *The Waste Land* is very largely concerned with making just such a disclosure, but can only communicate vividly through its own deliberate indistinctness: "The ideology of the text lies [...] in the fact that the 'phenomenal text' is able to 'show', but not *speak of*, the covert coherence which sustains it. For if that coherence is directly articulated, an ideological impact gained only through indirection is lost"⁸. Indeed, for Eagleton, this articulation - or non-articulation - is simultaneously the central subject, purpose and form of the poem, producing its own ideology:

it is an ideology of *cultural knowledge*. What the poem signifies, indeed, is not 'the decay of Europe' or fertility cults but its own elaborate display of esoteric allusion - a display enabled by such arcane or panoramic motifs. The reader who finds his or her access to the poem's meaning baulked by its inscrutable gesturing off-stage is already in possession of that 'meaning, without knowing it. Cultures collapse, but Culture survives, and its form is *The Waste Land*. (Eagleton, p.149)

⁸ *Criticism and Ideology: A Study in Marxist Literary Theory* (London: New Left Books, 1976), pp.145-51 (p.150).

The irony may not escape us of Eliot's supposed aloofness to *The Waste Land's* readers being attacked by an interpretation which is, in its own way, equally aloof to those same readers. Eagleton does not show much faith in the ability of readers to gain access to the allusions and their overall meaning, and one might question whether this attitude, as well as his own certainty with respect to the role of fertility cults, is actually based on a sufficient identification and understanding of the poem's allusions. In fact, my argument should in some respects vindicate Eagleton's evaluation of the poem, which seems to me to be partially correct, and certainly more perceptive and pertinent than most. Still, the allusive method and the motif of the fertility cult in the poem will be shown to be more closely interlinked and central to the text's form and meaning than Eagleton either admits or guesses. It is, perhaps, not so much the basic inclusion of the notes that should be the focus in this respect, rather what Eliot left out of them.

5.4. The problem with myth: criticism and anthropology.

Although he plays down the possible significance of the fertility cults Eagleton does, nevertheless, show a willingness to use the term "mythologies" in relation to the poem, though he is applying it in the very broad sense of cultural and political ideologies, and false ones at that. For Eagleton, it is the "closed, coherent, authoritative discourse" of such mythologies that runs as an alternate text behind the stylistically ruptured surface form (Eagleton pp.149-150). Ronald Bush has described Eagleton's approach, which dates from the late 1970s, as "pervasive" in its influence on recent Eliot criticism, once again helping to cast the poetry as classical and monolithic, though not in the same approving manner as New Criticism's similar conceptions in the 1930s, but rather with a reinvigorated hostility⁹.

For Bush, the welcome that has been afforded to Eagleton's view by non-Marxist critics largely relates to "that wing of post-structuralist theory that has come to ascribe to postmodernism more and more of the oppositional values that were once seen as the essence of modernism and consequently has depicted the modernists themselves as homogeneous and reactionary" (Bush, p.197) To cast *The Waste Land*

⁹ "T. S. Eliot and Modernism at the Present Time", in *T. S. Eliot: The Modernist in History*, ed. Ronald Bush (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), pp.191-204 (p.198).

as monolithic, then, has come to mean to emphasise its limitations, its impotent separateness, its sterile, self-imposed exile from “reality” in exchange for a place on a high and dry bookshelf. It needs to be understood that this approach is essentially author-based criticism masquerading as text-based criticism. Eagleton does not, or cannot, identify *from the text* exactly how or why Eliot’s allusive technique is elitist and reactionary as opposed to, let us say, subversive and open-ended (I am not necessarily arguing for either of these positions); his own treatment of *The Waste Land* derives from a prior consideration of Eliot’s social theory, some of which was written more than a quarter of a century after the poem in question.

Eagleton has slightly softened his views on modernism in the light of the rise of postmodernism, as demonstrated by his 1988 essay “Capitalism, Modernism and Postmodernism”, to which I shall refer later. That he should have damned the work with the man is not entirely surprising from a Marxist perspective. That others, most persuasively Maud Ellmann, should have come to similar conclusions concerning the secret - or rather, the *lack* of a secret - at the poem’s centre, stems partly from that key moment in Eliot criticism, the publication of the *Waste Land* manuscripts and typescripts in 1971¹⁰. One of the chief effects the publication had was, as far as some critics were concerned, to cast doubt upon myth as a central basis for interpretation of the poem. The additional material that had been rejected for the final poem was examined for its relation to Grail legend and “anthropology” and found wanting, notably by Marianne Thormählen’s insightful 1978 study, which pronounced the death rites over the “fertility rites” theme:

The relevance to the *Waste Land* motif, with its wealth of symbols, of fragments such as the shipwreck story and Fresca’s exploits is unobtrusive to say the least; and while it may be argued that the drowning of the Gloucester sailors and the buried corpse in “Exequy” carry associations to Weston’s and Frazer’s books on religious rites, the inclusion of such matter in *The Waste Land* would not have facilitated an authoritative interpretation along anthropological lines. Consequently, *Waste Land* criticism is moving away from the predominant conception of the poem as a superficially cryptic but meticulously elaborated pattern, based on the Grail legend and on vegetation

¹⁰*The Waste Land: A Facsimile and Transcript of the Original Drafts (TWLfac)*, ed. Valerie Eliot (London: Faber and Faber, 1971).

ceremonies expounded in the work of contemporary anthropologists ¹¹.

Referring to Eliot's introduction to his Notes, Thormählen goes on to protest that it "especially implies that any reading that fails to take *From Ritual to Romance* and *The Golden Bough* into account is warped from the outset, and so great has been the authority of those lines that few have dared to flout it". This is simply not the case, and I think some proper consideration of the movement of critical opinion on this issue is long overdue. Even where the poem was positively received, there were often reservations expressed by critics, from quite early on, with regard to its supposed anthropological aspects. Charles Powell's review in the *Manchester Guardian* in October 1923 was of the opinion that "meaning, plan and intention alike are massed behind a smoke-screen of anthropological and literary erudition"¹²; Lucas, disgruntled with the mere existence of the notes, deduced from their "fantastic mumbo-jumbo" content that the poem was perhaps "a theosophical tract" (Lucas, p.6); I. A. Richards, in 1926, dismissed Weston's "'astral' trimmings" as "nothing to do with Mr. Eliot's poem"¹³; in 1927 Robert Graves and Laura Riding, admirers of the poem, sniffed at what to them appeared a widespread vogue for anthropology, "which is really a new synthetic mythology composed of many mythologies. Not content with Tritons and Galleons and neo-Keatsian or neo-Elizabethan writing, many, as Mr Eliot, for instance, have borrowed extensively from Sir James Frazer's comparative study of primitive myths"¹⁴. In 1932, F. R. Leavis was conspicuous in warmly praising the anthropological background as "a peculiarly significant expression of the scientific spirit"¹⁵. Most critics were ambivalent as to how far they accepted the notion that the poem was somehow "based on" or "about", as opposed to just flavoured by, the anthropological works, particularly in view of Aiken's (truthful) claims that he had seen parts of the poem some years earlier as fragments, before *From Ritual to Romance* had even been published (Aiken, pp.52-58). The general tone could be described as one of polite scepticism.

¹¹ *The Waste Land: A Fragmentary Wholeness* (Lund: C. W. K. Gleerup, 1978), p.61.

¹² Repr. in Cox and Hinchliffe, pp.29-30 (p.29).

¹³ *Principles of Literary Criticism* (excerpt), in Cox and Hinchliffe, pp.51-55 (p.53).

¹⁴ *A Survey of Modernist Poetry* (London: Heinemann., 1927), p.171.

¹⁵ *New Bearings in English Poetry*, 2nd edn (London: Penguin, 1972), p.73.

Thormählen's notional valiant-but-outnumbered rebellion against Eliot's lamentable totalitarianism may be dated to about 1960. In the context of another basically favourable analysis, Karl Shapiro, in *The Death of Literary Judgement*, dismissed "the so-called 'mythic' form" as "worthless and not even true - for Eliot misread James Joyce's *Ulysses* when he saw it as a parallel to Homer"¹⁶. More cuttingly, Graham Hough gave his account of the initial effect of Eliot's anthropological dabbings:

prompted by the notes, many persons who had stopped reading *The Golden Bough* looked at it again, and those who had never heard of Jessie Weston read *From Ritual to Romance*. None of them were bold enough to say in public that these studies did little to advance their understanding.¹⁷

Hough goes on to attack the idea of Tiresias being central to the poem, as suggested in Eliot's note to line 218: "Who was Tiresias? A man who had also been a woman, who lived for ever and could foretell the future. That is to say, not a single human consciousness, but a mythological catch-all, and as a unifying factor of no effect whatever"(Hough, p.25).

But, as the examples of early responses I have listed above show, early readers did *not* seem to have swallowed Eliot's anthropological line unquestioningly, and even if they did fail to make the connection with the poem, that does not necessarily render the link non-existent or incomprehensible. The monolith that critics such as Hough and Thormählen really appear to have been attacking was not so much Eliot himself, but rather an idea of him as presented by the critic Grover Smith, "explicator-in-chief and now the recognised guide to Eliot's aims", as Ian Hamilton was sarcastically to comment¹⁸.

Smith's source guide to Eliot's poetry was published in 1956. Fastidious and impressive in the wealth of detail he presents, Smith nevertheless somewhat loses sense of proportion in his discussion of the question of narrative in *The Waste Land*, interpreting Eliot's note on Tiresias ("What Tiresias *sees*, in fact, is the substance of the poem"; ECP, p.82) in a manner that surpasses literalism, making Tiresias the

¹⁶*The Death of Literary Judgement* (excerpt), Cox and Hinchliffe, pp.62-63, p.62.

¹⁷*Image and Experience: Studies in a Literary Revolution* (London: Duckworth, 1960) p.21.

¹⁸"*The Waste Land*" in *Eliot in Perspective: A Symposium*, ed. Graham Martin (London: Macmillan, 1970), pp.102-11 (p.103).

speaker of the whole poem, where critical consensus (and common sense) would at least allow for the possibility of there being more than one voice to be found in the poem, even if only as interjections into a main narrative. This undoubtedly bizarre basis for interpretation of the poem had the unfortunate effect of obscuring the many virtues of Smith's research. That, thereafter, there has been comparatively an avoidance of source-based criticism¹⁹ on Eliot in favour of the theory-based variety tells us perhaps that other critics regarded Smith's magnum opus either as unsurpassable of its kind or as the unhelpful obsession of someone incapable of seeing the wood for trees; critics such as Hough, Hamilton and Thormählen would settle for the latter. It almost goes without saying that Smith was an unquestioning advocate of the importance of Eliot's Notes and the anthropological works referred to therein, and that they too became victims of the anti-Smith reaction.

What clearly riled Hamilton, writing in 1970, was the fact that "thousands of undergraduates every year are likely to be poring over [Smith's] interpretations" (Hamilton, p.103). This is still undoubtedly the case, but not, I would suggest, entirely undeservedly. The route taken by Hamilton in his own argument leads to a far more dubious state of affairs, rejecting, on principle, almost every assertion the former makes. For instance, Hamilton develops Hough's complaint about Tiresias to a ludicrous extreme, thus: "Tiresias is, after all, a freak. Old, blind, bisexual. Why should we take these characteristics to denote unusual wisdom (especially about sex) when they can more easily be taken to confess unusual ignorance?" (Hamilton, p.109). The logic of this is, to say the least, extremely questionable. One would hardly, for instance, argue that a rugby footballer who had played both league and union was "unusually ignorant" about rugby. Having attacked the monkey, Hamilton turns on the organ-grinder himself, accusing Eliot of literary snobbery:

Alongside the keen anthropologising there is a prim, aristocratic aloofness, a determination to keep up the barriers even as he pleads for their removal. Knowledge of some key literary source is often a necessary condition of our grasping Eliot's point that such knowledge cannot generally be hoped for.

(Hamilton, p.105)

¹⁹ See, for example, Gertrude Patterson, *T. S. Eliot: Poems in the Making* (Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 1971), p.1.

Like Eagleton, Hamilton produces no actual evidence of knowledge of any of the supposed key literary sources which might tell us this. And it is hardly as if Eliot owned the only copies of the books from which his allusions are taken. As I shall demonstrate, many of them are obvious and from works which one might reasonably expect someone interested in literature to be familiar with. One could ask why a poet should especially cater for those not minded actually to read much poetry; in any case, the allusions are very largely capable of having an effect on a reader who can initially comprehend few or none of them - many, this reader included, know that from their own experience.

As I noted above, the publication of the *Waste Land* facsimile was taken by many critics as final proof of the lack of a methodical plan in the poem, and of the comparative tenuousness of the "mythic" motif. The atmosphere in which Eagleton's and Ellmann's later de-bunking of Eliot flourished was one of quiescence in the face of Hamilton's attack²⁰ and Thormählen's misguided triumphalism (as it may be seen to be) concerning the original manuscript. It has henceforth come to be a general truth that when the issue of myth is raised in relation to *The Waste Land*, it is in a passing and politely dismissive manner: "Eliot's use of myth is indeterminate and not schematic"²¹. It may be seen, then, that only very rarely in the critical history of *The Waste Land* has the role of myth and anthropology been accorded much privilege or, indeed, examined and challenged with any great thoroughness.

²⁰ Hamilton's objections appear to have gained common currency: reproducing Eliot's scene in a recent anthology of twentieth-century poetry, Peter Forbes provides the following sarcastic explanatory note on Tiresias: "a Theban seer first mentioned in *The Odyssey*. Blind and having experienced a change of sex, he is seen by Eliot as uniquely wise in sexual matters"; *Scanning the Century: The Penguin Book of the Twentieth Century in Poetry* (London: Penguin, 1999), p.35n. Eliot does not claim that Tiresias is "uniquely wise" in sexual matters, nor that his *relative* wisdom (see my point above on rugby) has anything to do with his blindness (which is, incidentally, counter-pointed by his having the gift of prophecy), anymore than he adduces the man's Theban origins as having special bearing on his expertise. It is remarkable that no hostile critic has yet tried to disqualify Tiresias as a commentator on the grounds of his being only a fictional character - Hough goes close.

²¹ Manju Jain, *A Critical Reading of the Selected Poems of T. S. Eliot* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991), p.144. Likewise, Martin Scofield: "The myths seem to me not so much a clear structure as a source of elusive but suggestive echoes" (*T. S. Eliot: The Poems* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), p.248n); and Calvin Bedient: "Finally [in *The Waste Land*] Eliot dismisses myth [...] in favour of metaphor, which is in turn free of the narrative limits of myth" (*He Do The Police in Different Voices: The Waste Land and Its Protagonist* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1986), p.6.

As well as being partially the legacy of Smith's book, it seems to me that critical unwillingness to take the theme of myth in the poem seriously stems largely from misunderstandings concerning the relation between myth, literature and anthropology, added to mistaken speculation as to what Eliot was really attempting in his use of Frazer and Weston. In the examples given above, the detractors offer contradictory reasons for their suspicion of these writers: for Thormählen they are evidently a symptom of faddism on Eliot's part ("contemporary anthropologists"), but Hough dismisses Frazer, at least, as an incomprehensible relic unhelpfully dug up by Eliot (*The Golden Bough* had been published in instalments from 1890 to 1915), and Weston had been publishing books on Arthurian subjects since the late nineteenth century. They can hardly be both relic and flavour of the month, and Hough is closer to the truth: these writers were only contemporaries of Eliot in the sense that one can be a contemporary of one's parents. What is more pertinent is that the works of both writers became labelled unscientific and unscholarly, Weston from earlier on, with Frazer particularly so during the 1950s and early 1960s. Shapiro, Hough, Hamilton and Thormählen were actually following the lead given by critical anthropological articles such as "In the Shade of the *Golden Bough*" (1955) and "*Golden Bough* or Gilded Twig?" (1961), in which Frazer's place as a founding father of modern anthropology was fiercely questioned. His work relied very heavily on secondary sources, and he is usually alluded to now only with regard to his speculations concerning the significance and function of magic (which are considered to be erroneous)²².

It is the role of Weston and her interdisciplinary ventures that is perhaps the more telling. Helen Williams, sensibly defending the use of the anthropologists on the grounds that "the themes and symbols borrowed are clear and obvious and can be recognised on a very small knowledge of Frazer and Weston", explains that Eliot's debt to Weston is one of method rather than content: "In bringing the literary Grail material [...] into the realm of anthropology, Jessie L. Weston crosses the frontiers

²² Matthew Hodgart, "In the Shade of the *Golden Bough*", *Twentieth Century*, 157 (1955), 111-19; Edmund Leach, "*Golden Bough* or Gilded Twig?", *Daedalus*, 90 (1961), 371-99; Both cited by Daniel L. Pals, *Seven Theories of Religion* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), pp.51-52nn. As for his current standing in anthropology, Pals observes: "Frazer's views [...] have been almost universally discarded" (p.52n).

between history and legend, science and conjecture which might make the book suspect to a professional anthropologist but exciting to a poet”²³. This is an important point. I would go further, and suggest that the question of scientific relevance or veracity was very low on Eliot’s lists of priorities; he is interested not in what literature can contribute to anthropology, rather how anthropology could assist his own understanding and poetic representation of the relationship between literature and religion. It is the relational methodology that matters, more so than the actual material content.

If, instead of referring to the rather odd couple of Frazer and Weston, Eliot’s Notes had placed the very same poem in the context of those theories of Freud or Jung that pertained to myth, which would have been both feasible and perfectly plausible, it is a safe guess that the role of myth would have been treated far more seriously by critics²⁴. The question of whether a poet utilising myth should draw upon psychological or anthropological ideas of myth is largely irrelevant to the actual text of *The Waste Land*, for as Calvin Bedient has observed, myth in the poem is “entirely mediated through a “body” of European literature as historical, if not as contemporary as a gramophone or taxi. An allusion to a sylvan scene is not in the first instance an allusion to myth, but to Milton on myth” (Bedient, pp.3-4). I would agree: for Eliot, anthropological myth and psychological myth are subordinate to literary myth and his own myth of literature. Bedient additionally sees myth as subordinate to metaphor in the poem, a point of view I shall argue against in my elucidation of myth’s role in the poem.

Finally, before moving on to examine the evidence of anthropological myth in *The Waste Land* itself, a brief point should be made concerning Thormählen’s and others’ brandishing of the supposedly non-mythological original manuscript, especially in view of the resultant widespread surrender on this issue. It seems to me

²³ T. S. Eliot: *The Waste Land* (London: Edward Arnold, 1968), p.13

²⁴Regarding parallels with Jung, see my chapter on “Rhapsody on a Windy Night” above. As far as Freud is concerned, *Totem and Taboo* (1913) would certainly lend itself to some fruitful correlations with Eliot’s poem, for instance in his discussion of the prohibition against uttering the name of the dead person (c.f. opening lines of “What the Thunder Said”, 322-30, *ECP*, p.76); “Taboo and Emotional Ambivalence”, *Totem and Taboo: Some Points of Agreement Between the Mental Lives of Savages and Neurotics*, authorised transl. by James Strachey (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1950), pp.18-74 (pp.54-57, p.54). (Needless, perhaps, to say, Freud draws his anthropological data largely from Frazer.)

poor logic to claim that because Eliot left out a certain amount of non-mythological material from his final poem this proves that the end result has nothing to do with myth. A more logical - though equally unverifiable - argument would be that he might have omitted these parts precisely *because* they were not sufficiently mythological for his highly mythological poem. In any case, the interesting omitted poem “Exequy” (*TWLfacts*, p.101) clearly has Attis or Adonis ritual as its subject matter, as Thormählen grudgingly acknowledges. But my concern is with the existing poem.

II

5.5. Mythical themes of *The Waste Land* (ii) “Anthropological” background.

If, therefore, one will allow for the moment the propriety of considering Eliot's *thematic* introduction to his notes, we may identify the evidence and use of myth in the poem broadly as follows. The references to vegetation ceremonies fit or form the theme of the sterility of modern society, its meaningless rituals, its uncomfortable memories or notions of life and death as complementary aspects of physical and spiritual growth and existence. Particularly we note the apparent reference to an Osiris/Adonis/Christ figure whom the “Dog” threatens to dig up (perhaps to destroy, perhaps to resurrect) in the first part of the poem. The references to the Phoenician merchants Phlebas and Mr. Eugenides connect to Adonis rituals, and, via Jessie Weston's theories, to the bringing of the Grail ritual to Britain. The Grail itself is most obviously referred to by the inclusion of a Fisher King and the journey to the empty chapel. And the last part of the poem has strong echoes of the Garden of Gethsemane, Christ's passion and resurrection. This much is generally agreed, even by those who choose to see the mythic theme as largely a kind of esoteric flavouring to the poem. In the interests of space, clarity, and human patience, I do not propose to examine the poem line by line. Rather I will focus particularly on two sections, “A Game of Chess” and “The Fire Sermon”, in the context of a general survey of the whole from beginning to end. The features I am particularly interested in relate to Adonis myth and ritual, and their connection with the Grail Romances.

5.6. "The Burial of the Dead": The red rock and Adonis.

Reading for the first time the opening of "The Burial of the Dead", a smile may be raised by the lines "What are the roots that clutch, what branches grow / Out of this stony rubbish?" (ll.19-20). The initial shock or confusion of the reader is acknowledged, and we are offered, or perhaps only tantalised with, the clue that some explanation may be forthcoming if one comes "under the shadow of this red rock," (l.26). But perhaps this nugget of information crumbles into merely "a handful of dust". After this pause, the poem appears to recommence, as strange as before in its form and meaning. One cannot identify with much certainty the significance of the red rock, but one might suggest two (related) possible references here.

Firstly, if one follows Eliot's direction to the section of *The Golden Bough* that deals with Adonis - a course evidently ignored by many disgruntled critics - Frazer describes at length the valley of Aphaca in Syria which forms one supposed site of the story of Adonis. Put briefly, Adonis was a youth beloved of Aphrodite/Venus, the goddess of love; out hunting, he was killed by a bear or a boar (which may have been the jealous god of war, Ares/Mars in disguise). Venus pleaded with Hades, god of the Underworld not to keep Adonis, and an agreement was reached so that he spent half the year (autumn and winter) in the Underworld with his consort Persephone, and half the year (spring and summer) above ground (Frazer, p.329). The vegetation god aspect is clear. Frazer describes a temple to Adonis of Syenite granite and goes on to observe of the valley that

the heights which shut it in are crested at various points by ruined monuments of his worship, some of them overhanging dreadful abysses, [...] One such monument exists at Ghineh. The face of a great rock, above a roughly hewn recess, is here carved with figures of Adonis and Aphrodite. He is portrayed with spear in rest, awaiting the attack of a bear, while she is seated in an attitude of sorrow. [...] Every year, in the belief of his worshippers, Adonis was wounded to death on the mountains, and every year the face of nature itself was dyed with his sacred blood. So year by year the Syrian damsels lamented his untimely fate, while the red anemone, his flower, bloomed among the cedars of Lebanon, and the river ran red to the sea.. (Frazer, p.329)

One could speculate, therefore, that the "red rock" may be a monument to, or statue of, Adonis (and Venus). The temple mentioned earlier is of Syenite, which is a grey colour, but even this might be explained by reference back to "The Death of

Saint Narcissus”, the original source of the *Waste Land* line (see section 4.4). There, one is invited to “Come in under the shadow of this grey rock” (l.1), a rock which, however, turns “red” in the light of a fire. The redness of the rock could also be due simply to the sun shining on the mountains in the springtime²⁵. This image of Venus and Adonis, the grieving female and the warrior with his spear at rest, lends itself as a symbol within *The Waste Land*, with regard to representations of gender and the Great War, as will be seen in the consideration of “The Fire Sermon”.

5.7. Adonis and the Grail Myth and Ritual.

The second significance of the red rock might be with regard to the other main mythic strand in the poem, that of the Grail. Again, it is perhaps worth outlining Jessie Weston’s main theory, connecting as it does with the Adonis myth. In addition to *From Ritual to Romance* (1920), Weston wrote an earlier work, *The Quest of the Holy Grail* (1913), which contains much of the same ideas as the later book, and which, Grover Smith speculates, may have been read by Eliot at least before writing “Gerontion”, which seems itself to contain elements of the Fisher King myth²⁶. Weston postulates that the Grail Romances of the late twelfth and early thirteenth centuries had at their root descriptions of the initiation rituals of an Adonis cult, brought to Britain by the Phoenicians. The “Grail” itself may have been either a rock/stone, or a dish/cup, possessed of the power to feed and/or protect or restore life. Additional ritual objects were a sword (sometimes broken) and a lance. The latter objects are generally taken to be male symbols, the former, female ones. It is Weston’s contention that, with additional stories derived from folktales, the description became Christianised, the symbols lending themselves nicely to reincarnation as, for instance, the spear of the Roman Centurion Longinus, who pierced Christ’s side, with the “grail” becoming the cup of the Eucharist, holder of Christ’s royal blood, “*sang real*”, hence, via a linguistic slip, “*Sainte Grael*” - the

²⁵F. B. Pinion offers yet another interpretation: “The red rock ... is the Christian faith. The Church’s interpretation of ‘the shadow of a great rock in a weary land’ (Isaiah, xxxii.2) as the ‘blessings of Christ’s kingdom’ is undoubtedly implied; the rock symbolizes the Christian Church (Matthew, xvi.18), and ‘red’ hints at the Crucifixion”; *A T. S. Eliot Companion* (London: Macmillan, 1986), p.122.

²⁶ *The Quest of the Holy Grail* (London: G. Bell and Sons, 1913); Smith, p.66.

Holy Grail. The Phoenician element was fulfilled by the trader Joseph of Arimathea, supposed to have brought the objects to Britain after Christ's death.

The romances themselves described the adventures of knights and kings, and the search for the Grail. This search forms part of the Arthurian cycle of stories with which many are familiar. Knights referred to as involved in the Grail quest include Sir Percival, Sir Gawain, Sir Galahad and Sir Lancelot, with different writers choosing one hero over another as the protagonist (*From Ritual to Romance*, pp.12ff). The story usually includes, in some form, a wounded king in a castle surrounded by a kingdom that has turned into a waste land. He is meant to be keeper of the holy objects, the Grail and the Spear, but he, or one or more of his followers, has brought disaster upon himself and his people. The hero must restore the land by healing the king, or by allowing him to die a natural death. Before doing this he has to ask the king or one of the Grail maidens what is wrong with the king and with the land. There is sometimes a strict formula for the questions he must ask, and for the answers he must be given. If he fails to ask, his quest will fail. Many of the adventures involve a journey to the "Chapel Perilous" where the Grail is revealed in the dark of night, and the hero must often fight an opponent. This visit is often at the start of such quests.

Weston points out that the fashion for Grail Romances was very short-lived, suggesting to her that some Church authorities may have been aware of the "real" meaning of these apparently Christian stories, and may have suppressed them (*From Ritual to Romance*, pp.186-88). She also suggests that several of the Romance writers may have had some awareness of the original significance of what they were writing. One or two might even have been members of the cult (pp.159-61). The Christianisation of the account of the ritual seems therefore to be partly accidental, partly intentional. Why particularly those who understood, or even subscribed to, the original beliefs should assist with such a transformation is a question central to the whole idea of ritual, and, I would venture, to the whole of Eliot's poem.

5.8. Differing characteristics and purposes of ritual.

From one point of view, the Christianisation might be understood as the correction or fulfilment of the original ritual. The fit is indeed good, though not perfect. At the same time, a writer hostile to Christianity might hope to subvert the rival faith by implanting in it his own secret. In this sense Christianity becomes a host body for the Adonis cult. Whether sympathetic or antipathetic to Christianity, in so far as they conceived the story not as a romance but as a ritual of real power, the Christianisation may be a viable way of keeping the ritual alive. As I have stated earlier, one of the characteristics of a ritual is that it may not be necessary to understand its meaning in order for it to work. Indeed, one may not even be conscious that one is performing a ritual, as in the case of the walker in "Rhapsody on a Windy Night". On the other hand, complete ignorance of the performance, or lack of belief in the truth of, or even in the existence of, ritual, may result in only the husk of a ritual in the form of a parody or blasphemy, either ineffective or actively harmful. And it is just such a state of ignorance or derision that characterises the inhabitants of *The Waste Land*.

We should also, though, differentiate between physical and verbal performances of ritual. In "Rhapsody" the ritual element consists of an unconscious imitation of the walk of the dead on a night of all souls, as well as, perhaps, a parody of the resurrection of the male. And there is much of this, as well as other related mythical and ritualistic enactments, in the "action" of *The Waste Land* - for instance the crowd flowing over London Bridge in the "The Burial of the Dead", echoing both the night of all souls and the torments of the *Inferno*. As for the verbal elements, we may recall "Rhapsody"'s "whispering lunar incantations", but these are shadowy, unspecified. The parallel incantations in *The Waste Land* will be seen to be more defined, though still hard to ascertain. The key is to be identified in the literary allusions that riddle the poem. This being the case, one might ask whether the apparent obscurantism of this technique would not hinder rather than assist the reader or audience in their comprehension of, and participation in, the ritual.

It appears that the problems pertaining to mystic knowledge are not to be solved simply by throwing light on it, by more widely publicising its existence and nature. I repeat Weston's definition of the dual character of ritual, quoted earlier:

It is, of course, very generally recognised that in the case of most of the pre-Christian religions, upon the nature and character of whose rites we possess reliable information, such rites possessed a two-fold character - *exoteric*; in celebrations openly and publicly performed, in which all adherents of that particular cult could join freely, the object of such public rites being to obtain some external and material benefit, whether for the individual worshipper, or for the community as a whole - *esoteric*; rites open only to a favoured few, the initiates, the object of which appears, as a rule, to have been individual rather than social, and *non-material*. In some cases, certainly, the object aimed at was the attainment of a conscious, ecstatic, union with the god, and the definite assurance of a future life. In other words there was the public worship, and there were the mysteries. (Weston p.140)

Elsewhere, she also argues that the early Church Fathers did not recognise the gulf between Christian and pre-Christian teaching usually presumed, and that they wished to stress that Christianity was "in no way to be condemned on the ground that it made no appeal to the uninstructed. Rather they claim that they are in no way inferior to the older faiths. For if these had 'mysteries' so had Christianity". And she quotes St. Clement of Alexandria, re-iterating the principle that "The Mysteries of the Faith are not to be revealed to all" (*Quest of the Holy Grail*, p.105).

5.9. From Ritual to Tradition.

The parallels with Eliot's own literary critical views, in general and particularly in the early 1920s, are striking and amusing: for Weston's "Ritual" substitute "Tradition", for "Romance" "the Individual Talent". One should recall that Eliot's definition of tradition is quite the opposite of that remembered or assumed by many (in fact almost all) of its critics, who supposed it to function in an externalised form as a restrictive and almost unbearable weight on reader and author alike. As discussed in Chapter One, such a feeling possesses even an arch-advocate of a (highly idiosyncratic) canon like Bloom in *The Anxiety of Influence*. What Eliot actually wrote in "Tradition and the Individual Talent" was that "[The Tradition] cannot be inherited, and if you want it you must obtain it by great labour" (*SE*, p.20).

The “literariness” of *The Waste Land* might be read, in part, as an initiation ritual to just such an end. It must be repeated: contrary to the perception of countless readers that they are being dictated to in Eliot’s essay, there is no evidence in “Tradition and the Individual Talent” that he is referring to anyone but the *poet* as being a possible inheritor of the tradition. But readers may be partaking of the ritual without needing to have its meaning revealed. In the event, while Eliot later specifically distanced himself from the idea of the poem having a universal meaning, his notes to the poem unwittingly encouraged such an approach to it. Looking back years later, he remarked

I dislike the word ‘generation’. When I wrote a poem called *The Waste Land*, some of the more approving critics said that I had expressed ‘the disillusionment of a generation’ which is nonsense. I may have expressed for them their own illusion of being disillusioned, but that did not form part of my intention.²⁷

Eliot’s mistake was in his casual and slightly pompous reference to *The Golden Bough* as a book “which has influenced our generation profoundly” (“Notes on the Waste Land”; *ECP*, p.78). I would agree with Graham Hough here, that if it had not influenced “his” generation before they read his own note, then it certainly had from that moment onward, and always had...(see section 5.4). Whatever Eliot meant by “our generation”, he accidentally advertised a vacancy here that many came round to fill. But it seems fairly clear that instead of simply referring to people of his own age, Eliot considered his generation to be only a select few people such as Joyce and Pound. As his review of *Ulysses* made clear, he viewed the mythical method of literary structure as necessary for modern writers, though he also felt that only a few of them would be capable of using it:

Instead of narrative method, we may now use the mythical method. It is, I seriously believe, a step toward making the modern world possible for art [...] And only those who have won their own discipline in secret and without aid, in a world which offers very little assistance to that end, can be of any use in furthering this advance.²⁸

²⁷ quoted by Bergonzi, p.93, no source given.

²⁸ “Ulysses, Order, and Myth”, *Dial*, 75: 5 (1923), 480-83 (p.483).

Note that Eliot's concern is with making the modern world possible for art, rather than art possible for the modern world. Nevertheless, it can be argued that the esoteric aspect of the ritual is available to the participation and comprehension of the general reader, and that in this respect many of the allusions are to function like the versicles spoken by a priest, to which the congregation or readers must give the correct "responses". Again, as I have stated earlier, what matters is as much what the poet leaves out (both from the Notes and the poem) as what he puts in, the former being identifiable by reference to the latter.

5.10. The red rock in the hyacinth garden.

Another link between the "red rock" and the Grail myth may be found in the "hyacinth garden" section of part I, which immediately follows the description of the red rock in the desert:

*Frisch weht der Wind
Der Heimat zu
Mein Irisch Kind,
Wo weilest du?*

'You gave me hyacinths first a year ago;
'They called me the hyacinth girl.'
— Yet when we came back, late, from the hyacinth garden,
Your arms full, and your hair wet, I could not
Speak, and my eyes failed, I was neither
Living nor dead, and I knew nothing,
Looking into the heart of light, the silence.
Oed und leer das Meer. (ll.31-42)

Grover Smith first puzzled over the "hyacinth girl", in the sense that Eliot is turning a male symbol into a female one (Smith, pp.74-75). Hyacinth was a youth loved by Apollo, who accidentally killed him. Like Narcissus, Hyacinth was turned into a flower. James E. Miller writes that "Emphasis in the key line might be on *girl* (rather than hyacinth): "They called me the hyacinth *girl* !"" (Miller, p.71); he relates this image, in accordance with his general thesis, to Eliot's memory of a meeting in Luxembourg Gardens with Jean Verdenal, who was carrying a lilac branch.

There is perhaps a rather more simple, non-biographical, explanation, which stems from the etymological link between *hyacinth* and the precious stone *jacinth*²⁹. Now, Weston's Appendix about the Grail Procession includes passages from the romances which refer to such a stone. In the *Parzival* of Wolfram von Eschenbach, for instance:

Now see how they followed swiftly, four maidens twice told four,
And this was I ween, their office, four tapers tall they bore,
Nor the others deemed too heavy the weight of a precious stone,
And by day the sun shone through it, as Jacinth its name is known,
'Twas long and broad, and for lightness had they fashioned it fair and meet,
To serve at will for a table where a wealthy host might eat.

(*Quest of The Holy Grail*, p.141)

And we are told that the grail, itself another precious stone, is then laid on the jacinth. The red rock, then, in the context of 'The Burial of the Dead', is indeed either to cover or bear a mysterious object, and in this respect the hyacinth girl may very well be read as one of the jacinth bearers.

5.11. The hyacinth figure and *The Woman in White*.

Such a relation of the hyacinth to the mythical themes of the poem may be a sufficient explanation, but I do agree that the alternative theme of gender reversal suggested by Miller is important here, indeed possibly the more important in the passage as a whole. The imagery may call to mind the girl in "La Figlia Che Piange" with "Her hair over her arms and her arms full of flowers"(l.19). And again, there seems to be another echo of *The Woman in White*, and the episode in the rose garden where Marian informs Walter that Laura is engaged. The lines "I could not / Speak, and my eyes failed," seem strongly reminiscent of Walter's feelings of dejection mixed with gratitude for Marian's sensitivity: "I tried to look at her, when she took

²⁹ Both derive from the Greek word 'ἵακινθος (*hyakinthos*) which referred equally to stone and flower - in other words, neither word can be clearly identified as referring to the precedent other, though, in the light of the myth, it seems most likely that the stone is named after the flower. Nowadays, jacinth is taken to mean a "reddish-orange gem, a variety of zircon" - though "among the ancients", a gem of a blue colour, probably sapphire (*OED*). Varieties of hyacinth flowers are be white, yellow, blue, crimson, orange, purple and the lilac to which Miller alludes. According to Ovid (*Metamorphoses*, X) it was deep red or purple.

my hand, but my eyes were dim. I tried to thank her but my voice failed me.”(*WIW*, p.95)³⁰

The relationship between Walter and Marian is one of the most fascinating aspects of *The Woman in White*, and worth discussing briefly, I think, with regard both to the nature of the quester-protagonist in *The Waste Land* (if there be such a figure) and to the wider role of gender in the poem. As the previous extract and the line “she turned away ...” in “La Figlia” referred to earlier (section 4.3) make clear, the references to Walter’s feelings for Laura which seemed most to have impressed themselves on Eliot’s imagination are those mediated by the controlling figure of Marian. Similarly, it is Marian’s fears for Walter’s safety abroad that are most vividly stated - in a dream, Walter appears to her in a jungle, surrounded by disease and savages, promising her he will return. And Marian’s diary extracts form the central narrative of the book, whilst Laura contributes none, a rather timid character who spends much of the novel in a state of nervous and physical exhaustion. Walter swiftly comes to value Marian’s intelligence, humanity and resourcefulness, as does the villain Count Fosco, who considers her a worthy adversary. For much of the novel, while Walter is away, she must fight alone the conspiracy concerning Laura’s fortune. Why then does Walter not fall in love with Marian rather than the insipid Laura? The answer is that he finds her physically repulsive upon first meeting her. I have referred to this reaction in my discussion of “Rhapsody on a Windy Night”; the actual description is a startling one, which Eliot reproduced in his own essay on the novel, and which I repeat here:

³⁰The passage in Eliot’s poem has another parallel in Thomas Lovell Beddoes’ play *Death’s Jest Book*, where the character Sybilla remembers the “brave Saxon knight” Wolfram:

A noble generous man, in whose discourse
I found much pleasure: yet, when he was near me,
There ever was a pain which I perceived
Even in the very sweetness of my comfort:
My heart was never still: and many times,
When he had fetched me flowers, I trembled so
That oft they fell as I was taking them
Out of his hand. When I would speak to him
I heard not, and I knew not what I said.
Yet this I thought was Love. O self deceived! (I. ii. 116-25)

The Works of Thomas Lovell Beddoes, ed. with introduction by H. W. Donner (London: Oxford University Press, 1935).

The instant my eyes rested on her, I was struck by the rare beauty of her form, and by the unaffected grace of her attitude. Her figure was tall, yet not too tall; comely and well developed, yet not fat; her head set on her shoulders with an easy, pliant firmness; her waist, perfection in the eyes of a man, for it occupied its natural place, it filled out its natural circle, it was visibly and delightfully undeformed by stays. She had not heard my entrance into the room; and I allowed myself the luxury of admiring her for a moment, before I moved one of the chairs near me, as the least embarrassing means of attracting her attention. She turned towards me immediately. The easy elegance of every movement of her limbs and body as soon as she began to advance from the far end of the room, set me in a flutter of expectation to see her face clearly. She left the window - and I said to myself, the lady is dark. She moved forward a few steps - and I said to myself - the lady is young. She approached nearer - and I said to myself (with a sense of surprise which words fail me to express), The lady is ugly! [...] The lady's complexion was almost swarthy, and the dark down on her lip was almost a moustache. She had a large, firm, masculine mouth and jaw; prominent, piercing, resolute brown eyes; and thick, coal-black hair, growing unusually low down on her forehead. Her expression - bright, frank, and intelligent - appeared, while she was silent, to be altogether wanting in those feminine attractions of gentleness and pliability, without which the beauty of the handsomest beauty alive is beauty incomplete.³¹

The reason for Collins employing such a bizarre description is hard to fathom; he builds the reader's and Walter's expectations only to dash them emphatically. Why? For shock value? Or to rule out Marian as a possible love interest? If the latter, he might simply have described her as rather plain, or *entirely* masculine, or perhaps considerably older than Laura and Walter. One implication of this male-female duality in Marian might be supposed to be that Marian's masculine head is a manifestation of her superior "male" intelligence that makes her an honorary man in a cast of characters that it is predominantly female; her female body, in a complimentary manner, manifests her superior "female" sensitivity, a sensitivity to which Walter's role as a drawing master to young ladies allows him access also. This is the positive interpretation I think we are meant to make, but D.A. Miller makes a strong case for an opposing view that Marian's mixed-gender appearance and personality is a device that renders her external rather than central to the established system of sexual difference: "Unable to compete [...] she cannot be 'male'; unable to attract [...] she cannot be female. What is thereby neutralized, in the root as well as the derived senses of the word, is any sexuality - female and/or male - which cannot

³¹ W/W, pp.58-59; Eliot, *SE*, p.466.

be reduced to either term of a phallic binarism.”³² He also argues that this tells us at least as much about the psychology of the author and Walter as it does about Marian. Certainly Walter’s narrative gives ample evidence of his fear of women, that his attraction to Laura will make him lose his “hardly-earned self-control” (*WIW*, pp.89-90). D.A. Miller sees this in terms of a fear of emasculation and/or feminisation which Walter has previously avoided despite his close contact with many young women in the course of his teaching (D. A. Miller, p.112). Walter even uses the image of the siren so familiar in Eliot’s early poetry³³. The role of the dual-gendered Marian in Collins’ novel is important but restricted, pivotal but kept down by that which pivots on it. I shall be considering this model (and that offered by another character from *The Woman in White*) with regard to my consideration of both Tiresias and the woman in “A Game of Chess”.

III

5.12. Reckonings in rooms: “A Game of Chess”.

The second part of *The Waste Land* is divided into two main scenes, the first being an enervated encounter with a woman in an ornate room, the second a monologue by a cockney woman in a pub. the first of these scenes opens with a long descriptive passage which has excited considerable comment, and which I reproduce here:

The chair she sat in, like a burnished throne,
 Glowed on the marble, where the glass
 Held up by standards wrought with fruited vines
 From which a golden Cupidon peeped out
 (Another hid his eyes behind his wing)
 Doubled the flames of sevenbranched candelabra
 Reflecting light upon the table as
 The glitter of her jewels rose to meet it,
 From satin cases poured in rich profusion.
 In vials of ivory and coloured glass
 Unstoppered, lurked her strange synthetic perfumes,
 Unguent, powdered, or liquid - troubled, confused

³² “*Cage aux Folles: Sensation and Gender in Wilkie Collins’s The Woman in White*”, in *The Nineteenth-Century British Novel*, ed. Jeremy Hawthorn (London: Edward Arnold, 1986), pp. 95-124 (p.116).

³³ “Lulled by the syren song that my own heart sung to me, with eyes shut to all sight, and ears closed to all sound of danger, I drifted nearer and nearer to the fatal rocks”; *WIW*, p.62.

And drowned the sense in odours; stirred by the air
 That freshened from the window, these ascended
 In fattening the prolonged candle-flames,
 Flung their smoke into the laquearia,
 Stirring the pattern on the coffered ceiling.
 Huge sea-wood fed with copper
 Burned green and orange, framed by the coloured stone,
 In which sad light a carvèd dolphin swam.
 Above the antique mantel was displayed
 As though a window gave upon the sylvan scene
 The change of Philomel, by the barbarous king
 So rudely forced; yet there the nightingale
 Filled all the desert with inviolable voice
 And still she cried, and still the world pursues,
 'Jug Jug' to dirty ears.
 And other withered stumps of time
 Were told upon the walls; staring forms
 Leaned out, hushing the room enclosed.
 Footsteps shuffled on the stair.
 Under the firelight, under the brush, her hair
 Spread out in fiery points
 Glowed into words, then would be savagely still.

(ll. 77-100)

Pound's principal reaction in editing this section was to write alongside it "Don't see what you had in mind here" (*TWLfacts*, p.11). Subsequent criticism has noted the references to Shakespeare's Cleopatra and to Virgil's Dido, "two queens who chose death rather than life without love"³⁴, Eliot's own notes directing us to the fairly obvious allusion to *Antony and Cleopatra* in the opening lines and to the provenance of the word "laquearia" (a carved ceiling), namely Dido's banquet for Aeneas in *Aeneid* Book I (*ECP*, p.81). Taking their cue from the opening allusion to Cleopatra and what seems to follow, some critics have read the passage as a critique of the twentieth century's guardianship of Europe's history and culture. As Hugh Kenner puts it,

In this room the European past, effects and objets d'art gathered from many centuries, has suffered a sea change into something rich and strange, and stifling. Sensibility here is the very inhibition of life; and activity is reduced to the manic capering of 'that Shakespeherian Rag', the past imposing no austerity, existing simply to be used.

(Kenner, p.176)

³⁴ Elizabeth Drew, *T. S. Eliot: The Design of His Poetry* (London: Eyre and Spottiswoode, 1950), p.102

And Derek Traversi notes specifically that the “burnished throne of the modern woman glows not, like Cleopatra’s barge, on the living, shifting water which is the Egyptian queen’s element, but by reflection on a polished surface of dead, unyielding marble”³⁵. To which it could be objected that one could hardly expect the woman to have a swimming pool and barge installed in her room, though the identification of the marbled room as an unintended monument or gravestone to a dead Europe is undoubtedly a fair one.

So the two main impressions made by the room’s interior might be said to be the artificiality of this female’s “nature”, and the sterility of a modern European Culture that can only degrade, not add to, its inheritance. Critics have also remarked upon the strange insubstantiality of the room’s occupant by contrast with the room itself. As Hugh Kenner observes, “The human inhabitant appears once, in a perfunctory subordinate clause” (Kenner, p.132). Carol Christ focuses closely on this transference of primacy to the room over its female occupant and relates it to “A Game of Chess” as a whole:

She only appears at the end of her passage, in the fiery points of her hair, which are instantly transformed into words. The passage thus finally gives the reader only a fetishistic replacement of the woman it never visualizes, a replacement for which he immediately substitutes a voice. [...] All of the eyes that do not look in this section of the poem are juxtaposed to images of a deconstituted body, imagined alternately as withered stumps of time, the rat’s alley where the dead men lost their bones, and the teeth and baby Lil must lose. As the men in this section resist looking, so they do not speak. (Christ, p.33)

The woman herself does speak, as I shall discuss, but it seems clear that it is the long and detailed description of the room which creates the foundation, perhaps even the superstructure, for our evaluation of her role and character. The description can, it seems to me, be traced back to a number of possible sources, sources which, I believe, might prove greatly instructive in our consideration of the themes and symbolism of this part of the poem; of the identity and significance of the room’s inhabitant; and indeed of the very acts of creating and interpreting art and language. In the following sections I will discuss specific sources individually and in relation to

³⁵ T.S. Eliot: *The Longer Poems* (London: Bodley Head, 1976), p.33.

one another. There are a number of “family resemblances” which I have in mind when drawing the parallels, principally: cupidons or cherubs; perfumes; carved or ornately decorated ceilings; elaborate or fantastical lighting; references to the sea or underwater places; a picture or pictures inside the larger picture of the description as a whole - being here “the change of Philomel” from Ovid’s *Metamorphoses*, the “carved dolphin” and “other withered stumps of time” on the walls; the chair or throne, with its occupier or owner; and finally, the woman’s sole physical characteristic, her startling hair. The main sources all include most of these features, and for a number of interesting possible reasons as concerns their possible relation to Eliot’s poem. Before I do this, I would like to give a moment’s consideration to the source of the title itself, “A Game of Chess”.

5.13. Chess and the Duchess.

Whilst reading a fairly clear allusion to Middleton’s play *A Game At Chesse* in the title of this part of the poem, criticism has overlooked an arguably more significant reference to a game of chess in the original title of this part. Eliot titled the original draft of part II “The Death of the Duchess” (subsequently “In the Cage”, finally “A Game of Chess”). Lyndall Gordon makes the common evaluation of its derivation, and takes issue with its apparent obscurity:

Eliot’s Duchess is identified with Webster’s Duchess of Malfi, a proud, self-assertive woman whose reckless marriage to her steward leads to her ruin. But this allusion, like most of Eliot’s, is so coloured by personal circumstance that to pursue it is rather pointless. (Gordon, p.96)

Gordon may have been looking for and then dismissing the wrong allusion - “The Death of the Duchess” does indeed contain a number of allusions to Webster’s play (see *TWLfacs*, pp.104-07, 103n), but the title itself may refer both to Browning’s poem “The Flight of the Duchess”, in which a Duchess - the name of whose servant is, incidentally, called Jacinth - has her hair brought to life by Gypsy music³⁶, and,

³⁶*Poems of Robert Browning* (London and New York: Oxford University Press, 1912), p.90. The music first revivifies the duchess herself, then:

filling her, passed redundant
Into her very hair, back swerving
Over each shoulder, loose and abundant,
As her head thrown back showed the white throat curving;

perhaps more significantly, to Chaucer's poem *The Book of the Duchess*, which he himself lists under another title, "the Deth of Blaunche the Duchesse" in "The Legend of Good Women" (l.406)³⁷. It is a dream fable, written by Chaucer as an elegy for Blanche Duchess of Lancaster, sometime between 1368 and 1371. Practically all the poem's episodes and themes have parallels in Eliot's poem: a tale from Ovid is described, about of a drowned king³⁸; the reading of Ovid for consolation and relaxation is, in the first place, the depressed and sleepless poet's preference over chess (*Book of the Duchess*, ll.44-51); later on there is a sustained chess allegory (ll.618-86) in which a knight in black speaks of the loss of his beloved: "For fals Fortune hath pleyede a game / At the chesse with me, allas the while! / [...] / With her false draughtes dyvers / She staale on me and toke my fers"³⁹(cf. "And we shall play a game of chess..." etc. *TWL*, l.137). Other parallels with *The Waste Land* include the description of a beautiful bedroom and the sounds of hunting (ll.322-34) and of the hidden garden where the dreamer hears the widower's lament (ll.398ff). Finally, one might compare Chaucer's recurrent use of the word "nothing" in the dreamer's numb and listless monologue that opens the poem (ll.4-13) with the bleak "nothings" of the couple in "A Game of Chess" (ll.120-26) and "I can connect / Nothing with nothing" in "The Fire Sermon"; this seems to me at least as likely a point of derivation as the usual suspect, *King Lear*'s "Nothing will come of nothing"⁴⁰.

And the very tresses shared in the pleasure,
Moving to the mystic measure,
Bounding as the bosom bounded. (ll.52-58)

³⁷ *The Book of the Duchess*, ed. Helen Phillips (Durham: Durham and Saint Andrews Medieval Texts, 1982); "The Legend of Good Women", in *The Riverside Chaucer*, ed. Larry D. Benson and others (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988), p.600.

³⁸ The myth of King Ceyx and Queen Alcyone, *Metamorphoses*, XI, ll.410-750. Phillips' discussion of it, pp.28-33.

³⁹ *fers* means "Queen" in chess terminology, though it was originally a masculine piece (see *The Book of the Duchess*, pp.45-6n).

⁴⁰ I have so many an ydel thoght
Purely for default of slepe
That, by my trouthe, I take no kepe
Of noothinge, how hyt cometh or gooth,
Ne me nys nothyng leve nor looth.
Al is ylyche goode to me:
Joy or sorrowe, whereso hyt be
For I have felynge in nothyng
But as yt were a mased thyng,
Always in poynt to falle adoun. (ll.4-13)

Although Marianne Thormählen makes a reasoned case on behalf of the validity of unverifiable allusions⁴¹, I am not keen to overemphasise the likelihood that Eliot *was* alluding to Chaucer's poem in *The Waste Land*, especially as other derivations I shall suggest strike me as more credible and pertinent. Still, I would suggest that *The Book of the Duchess* might prove to be of critical interest. Perhaps its chief significance, if any, could be a generic one, in its sharing roots in medieval French literature with the very grail romances themselves that Weston discusses. The themes of courtly love, the quest, and the dream vision that characterise this kind of literature are prominent in the poems that follow *The Waste Land*, 'The Hollow Men' and *Ash Wednesday*. In this respect, allusion to Chaucer's poem might serve as another of those links to aspects of the medieval, literary, historical and religious, that Eliot attempted to establish in this poem and others.

5.14. Chaste Venuses: Imogen and Hero.

In addition to the Cleopatra and Dido references, Grover Smith demonstrates the substantial influence of the intruder Iachomo's account of Imogen's room in Shakespeare's *Cymbeline* II. ii and iv. (Smith, p.80). The salient parts of the account are as follows:

'Tis her breathing that
Perfumes the chamber thus. The flame o' th' taper
Bows towards her and would under-peep her lids
[...]

But my design
To note the chamber. I will write all down:
Such and such pictures; there the window; such
The adornment of her bed; the arras, figures-
Why such and such; and the contents of th' story.
Ah, some natural notes about her body
Above ten thousand meaner movables
Would testify, t'enrich mine inventory.

⁴¹ Thormählen states: "In my view, suggestions made by critics and scholars concerning possible influences do not stand or fall with the evidence in favour of Eliot's having been aware of such influences (the likelihood of that awareness is beyond our power to determine in any case). A suggestion is permissible if it contains a source the exploration of which introduces a perspective that can be seen to work in Eliot's context (and is not precluded by obvious impediments). It is of course important to take stock of the probability that Eliot may have been in some sort of actual contact with the source in question, but lack of evidence is no reason in itself to abstain from citing a possible reference" (p.66).

She hath been reading late
 The tale of Tereus; here the leaf's turned down
 Where Philomel gave up. I have enough. (II. ii. 18-46)

it was hang'd
 With tapestry of silk and silver; the story,
 Proud Cleopatra when she met her Roman
 And Cydnus swell'd above the banks, or for
 The press of boats or pride. A piece of work
 So bravely done, so rich, that it did strive
 In workmanship and value; which I wonder'd
 Could be so rarely and exactly wrought
 [...]

The chimney
 Is south the chamber, and the chimney-piece
 Chaste Dian bathing. Never saw I figures
 So likely to report themselves. The cutter
 Was as another nature, dumb; outwent her,
 Motion and breath left out
 [...]

The roof o' th' chamber
 With golden cherubins is fretted; her andirons -
 I had forgot them - were two winking Cupids
 Of silver, each on one foot standing, nicely
 Depending on their brands. (II. iv. 66-91)

Smith notes principally the references to “two winking cupidons”, the impression that Imogen’s breathing sleep “perfumes the chamber thus”, and that she has been reading about the rape of Philomel by Tereus. Eliot’s room pictures this rape displayed above the “antique mantel”, whilst the picture in Imogen’s room is a carving on the chimney piece of “chaste Dian bathing”. Unfortunately, as is sometimes the case elsewhere in his admirable research, Smith bags this evidence but does not examine it for clues, namely the purpose of the comparisons and contrasts between the *Cymbeline* scenes and Eliot’s, as well as those comparisons and contrasts *within* the Imogen description. In scene ii, Iachomo notes the contents of the room, but remarks that “some natural notes about her body” would say much more about her. Now, this is equally the problem for the readers of *The Waste Land*: we do not have the woman, only her room. In fact, Iachomo does find a “natural note”, namely a mole on Imogen’s breast, but this is another problem, since Iachomo’s visit is entirely dishonourable and devious in purpose: he wants to convince Imogen’s fiancé that he,

Iachomo, has slept with her. The very act of his later description, whether he is talking about the room's furnishings or its occupant, is a symbolic act of violation like Tereus's rape of Philomela. So even if we use only Imogen as an analogue, this may already adjust in an unexpected way the sinister feel of Eliot's scene.

In scene iv, Iachomo's reporting of the "seduction" scene again offers up internal ironies. The pictures in the room are not simply decoration, they offer contrasting historical-mythical analogy's for the very nature of Iachomo's visit. The first, an exuberant description of Cleopatra meeting Antony is how Iachomo would like the scene to be envisioned (sultry avatar of Venus welcomes her heroic lover), whereas the second, "chaste Dian bathing", is too close for comfort if one recalls what comes next in the myth of Diana and Acteon (intruder spies on defenceless virgin - and is torn to pieces ...).

The *Cymbeline* scenes, taken together, then, as well as providing a contrasting allusive analogue for the woman in "A Game of Chess" (Imogen's chaste and unaffected good nature versus sterile and sinister artifice), and additionally a comment on the morality of summing someone up in these terms and for this purpose, can also be seen as *themselves* operating according to an allusive literary-mythical method. In relation to the Venus/Diana opposition, we note especially that the description of the picture of Cleopatra and Antony is a nod back to Enobarbus's celebrated description of the same from a few years earlier in Shakespeare's own *Antony and Cleopatra* (II. ii). And of course, it is an altered line from *that* description that Eliot uses as the opening line of his description ("The barge she sat in, like a burnish'd throne ..." / "The chair she sat in, like a burnished throne ..."). Except that, even here the trail does not stop, for Shakespeare's line is itself very likely alluding to another avatar of Venus, this time the heroine of that rich source for both himself and Eliot, Marlowe's "Hero and Leander":

At Sestos Hero Dwelt; Hero the fair,
Whom young Apollo courted for her hair,
And offered as a dower his *burning throne*
Where she should sit for men to gaze upon.
The outsides of her garments were of lawn,
The lining purple silk, with gilt stars drawn;
Her wide sleeves green, and bordered with a grove
Where Venus in her naked glory strove

*To please the careless and disdainful eyes
 Of proud Adonis, that before her lies;
 Her kirtle blue, whereon was many a stain,
 Made with the blood of wretched lovers slain.
 Upon her head she ware a myrtle wreath,
 From whence her veil reached to the ground beneath.
 Her veil was artificial flowers and leaves,
 Whose workmanship both man and beast deceives;
 Many would praise the sweet smell as she passed,
 When 'twas the odour which her breath forth cast;
 And there for honey, bees have sought in vain,
 And, beat from thence, have lighted there again.
 About her neck hung chains of pebble-stone,
 Which, lightened by her neck, like diamonds shone.
 She ware no gloves, for neither sun nor wind
 Would burn or parch her hands, but to her mind
 Or warm or cool them, for they took delight
 To play upon those hands, they were so white.
 Buskins of shells all silvered, usèd she,
 And branched with blushing coral to the knee,
 Where sparrows perched, of hollow pearl and gold,
 Such as the world would wonder to behold;
 Those with sweet water oft her handmaid fills,
 Which, as she went, would chirrup through the bills.
 Some say for her the fairest cupid pined,
 And looking in her face, was strooken blind.
 But this is true: so like was one the other,
 As he imagined Hero was his mother;*

(ll.5-38; my italics)

Here we note principally the family resemblances of the “burning throne”, the picture within a picture (of Venus and Adonis, appropriately enough, considering the kinship with Shakespeare’s poem), the naturally sweet-smelling breath, and the cupid struck blind by looking in her face. Out of all the analogues I have in mind for the passage in *The Waste Land*, Marlowe’s is the closest to presenting the woman through herself rather than through the context of objects and decorations that surround her. Even here, it is true that - unlike Leander - she is mainly constructed through her clothing, though we are told about her hands and her breath. Her face, we may presume, is “fair”, though this is rendered via the part-hyperbolic, part-sinister effect it has on the cupid (evocations of Medusa’s petrifying glance, here) rather than through direct description. But overall, the relationship between art and nature is a fairly happy one: the flowers of her veil are artificial but convincing, though the real perfume emanates from Hero herself - art does justice to her beauty, rather than simply constituting it as in “A Game of Chess” and a number of the other analogues.

“Hero and Leander”, then, may be viewed as the “original”, of which succeeding and increasingly reified descriptions are symbols or reproductions, although it is itself to a lesser extent a symbol and a reproduction itself. And the resultant concern with their own artifice of the other analogues themselves becomes increasingly equal to those passages’ more ostensible conscious concerns with the art and artifice that is being described “within” them. We see this already, not so much in *Antony and Cleopatra*, where the queen “O’er-pictur[es] that Venus where we see / The fancy outwork nature” (II. ii. 199-200), but in *Cymbeline*, where it is the picture within the picture under discussion, rather than the human figure at the centre (as in “Hero and Leander”) which becomes the focus for the art-nature debate:

Chaste Dian bathing. Never saw I figures
So likely to report themselves. The cutter
Was as another nature, dumb; outwent her,
Motion and breath left out

Here, Imogen is relegated to a secondary position by the fore-fronting of myth (Diana, of whom she is really the avatar) and the artist (the sculptor outdid nature), as well as, in a larger sense, the fore-fronting of Iachomo’s preferred mythical analogy (Antony and Cleopatra). The female figure is starting to become obscured - distorted or betrayed even - by the symbols and objects that surround her. This will be seen to be increasingly the case in the later analogues.

5.15. Another occupant for the room.

In mythical terms, the description in “A Game of Chess”, and the dialogue which follows, may be read as another stage in the Grail quest, prefigured by the meeting with Madame Sosostriis in “The Burial of the Dead”. Before discussing this aspect of the passage, I would like to suggest another possible derivation for the encounter, one which bears relation to the main themes and mythic symbolism already supposed, whilst applying to them its own slant regarding gender reversal. I turn again to *The Woman in White*. The passage I have in mind is in Chapter VII, and describes Walter’s first meeting with the owner of Limmeridge House, the reclusive Mr. Fairlie. Walter is shown in by a servant:

I found myself in a large, lofty room, with a magnificent carved ceiling, and with a carpet over the floor, so thick and soft that it felt like piles of velvet under my feet. One side of the room was occupied by a long bookcase of some rare inlaid wood that was quite new to me. It was not more than six feet high, and the top was adorned with statuettes in marble, ranged at regular distances one from the other. On the opposite side stood two antique cabinets; and between them, and above them, hung a picture of the Virgin and Child, protected by glass, and bearing Raphael's name on the gilt tablet at the bottom of the frame. On my right hand and on my left, as I stood inside the door, were chiffoniers and little stands in buhl and marquetterie, loaded with figures in Dresden china, with rare vases, ivory ornaments, and toys and curiosities that sparkled at all points with gold, silver, and precious stones. At the lower end of the room, opposite to me, the windows were concealed and the sunlight was tempered by large blinds of the same pale sea-green colour as the curtains over the door. The light thus produced was deliciously soft, mysterious, and subdued; it fell equally upon all the objects in the room; it helped to intensify the deep silence, and the air of profound seclusion that possessed the place; and it surrounded, with an appropriate halo of repose, the solitary figure of the master of the house, leaning back, listlessly composed, in a large easy-chair, with a reading-easel fastened on one of its arms, and a little table on the other. (WIW, p.65)

I note here particularly the carved ceiling, the picture of a Raphael Virgin and Child⁴², and the sea-green light. Overall, I would suggest, the impression is strikingly similar to the room in Eliot's poem. And just as *that* description starts impressively, then becomes ghastly, overpowering, and claustrophobic, so Mr. Fairlie's room will increasingly show itself too lush, too affectedly luxurious and artificial for Walter's

⁴² It is hard to guess which Raphael painting is being referred to - presumably a fictitious minor work or a fake that merely carries his name. Shortly after the passage I have quoted, Mr. Fairlie draws Walter's attention to the picture, whilst on the subject of the noisy children from the village whom he claims have been disturbing him:

"I sadly want a reform in the construction of children. Nature's only idea seems to be to make them machines for the production of incessant noise. Surely our Raffaello's conception is infinitely preferable?"

He pointed to the picture of the Madonna, the upper part of which represented the conventional cherubs of Italian Art, celestially provided with sitting accommodation for their chins, on balloons of buff-coloured cloud.

"Quite a model family!" said Mr. Fairlie, leering at the cherubs. "Such nice round faces, and such nice soft wings, and - nothing else. No dirty little legs to run about on, and no noisy little lungs to scream with" (WIW, pp.69-70).

This might make us think of Raphael's most celebrated Madonna, the *Sistine Madonna* (now in Dresden). This painting is now most famous for the two rather bored-looking cherubs at its base, only one of whom is looking up at the main characters. The parallel with Eliot's cupidons seems to me equally as strong (especially bearing in mind the other similarities between Eliot's and Collins' rooms) as that in *Cymbeline*. Indeed, their estimation in contrast to the unappealing "real" children is typical of the whole of "A Game of Chess", wherein human children are wished to have been aborted with pills (TWL, ll.158-61). In both works the artificially created (or finished) young life is preferred to the natural by the characters.

tastes. This feeling is particularly provoked by the appearance of Mr. Fairlie himself, a man judged to be in his fifties, pale, effete, and expensively attired:

His feet were effeminately small, and were clad in buff-coloured silk stockings, and a little womanish bronze-leather slippers. Two rings adorned his white delicate hands, the value of which even my inexperienced observation detected to be all but priceless. Upon the whole, he had a frail, languidly fretful, over-refined look - something singularly and unpleasantly delicate in its association with a man, and at the same time, something which could by no possibility have looked natural and appropriate if it had been transferred to the personal appearance of a woman. My morning's experience of Miss Halcombe had predisposed me to be pleased with everybody in the house; but my sympathies shut themselves up resolutely at the first sight of Mr. Fairlie. (WIIW, p.66)

The reference to Marian is significant because whilst she symbolises the mannish woman - an oddity, but not without its qualities in Walter's hierarchy of gender - Mr. Fairlie seems to be the opposite, the womanish man. Whilst Marian is half-feminised and partly phallicised, he is seen as merely emasculated, unable to represent favourably any aspect of masculinity or femininity. Furthermore, the parallel between the occupants of the two rooms is extended by the similarity of their speech; the woman's opening "My nerves are bad to-night" (l.111) has its antecedent in Fairlie's repeated references ("in a querulous, croaking voice, which combined, in anything but an agreeable manner, a discordantly high tone with a drowsily languid utterance") to "the wretched state of my nerves" (WIIW, p.67). Both are hypochondriacs, but whereas Eliot's woman craves conversation and company, Fairlie recoils from them.

They share the same air of over-cultivated sterility though, her perfume vials paralleled by Mr. Fairlie's "jeweller's brushes, a wash-leather stump, and a little bottle of liquid, all waiting to be used in various ways for the removal of any impurities which might be discovered on the coins" (WIIW, p.66). Mr. Fairlie collects coins, drawings, painting, statues and so forth, and it is part of Walter's terms of employment to mount and prepare some of the drawings. In both scenes the occupants are surrounded by glories intended to reflect on their owners, but equally, in both cases the visitor seems repulsed or unnerved by the cultural objects they recognise, and by their new contexts. Both Collins and Eliot seem to be playing off lovers of art

against actual creators of such art. Unable to make art, Fairlie and the woman become parasites, themselves grown artificial, attempting to span the gulf between the human being and the work of art. In this they recall (or foreshadow) the aesthetes of the 1890s (and 1990s) as well as Gerontion's co-tenants, Mr. Silvero and Hakagawa.

5.16. The room's inhabitant as Grail Maiden or Fisher King.

If the parallel with Mr. Fairlie is allowed in terms of a decadent and listless culture, it may also be relevant with regard to the mythic symbolism and characterisation of the poem. As I have mentioned above, the passage in Eliot's poem marks the second conversation with a woman, or, more accurately, the second overheard monologue, the first being the visit to Madame Sosostris, "famous clairvoyante" (ll.43-59). Grover Smith has speculated that Eliot derived the name and profession of this character from Aldous Huxley's novel *Crome Yellow* (1921), wherein a man disguises himself as the sorceress of Ecbatana, Sesostris, in a fortune-telling act at a church fete (Smith, p.76). Sesostris is originally the name of an ancient middle-eastern king, so that Eliot is completing the character's metamorphosis from male to female that Huxley started. Smith identifies Madame Sosostris symbolically with a former Grail maiden, now changed into a "loathly damsel", who may be restored to her previous beauty if the quester is successful. And the woman in "A Game of Chess", as well as the figure in the hyacinth garden, are in his opinion representatives of an unchanged Grail maiden (Smith, p.76). The purpose of the quester in these situations is to ask the maiden how the Fisher King - he is given various names - has sustained the wound that leaves him in a state between life and death, and his kingdom a waste land. Jessie Weston is quite clear that the wound in the king's "thigh" has a very specific meaning, undoubtedly related to the infertility of the land.

Smith relates the title "A Game of Chess" to that of Middleton's play *A Game at Chesse*, though more so to the chess game in another of his plays, *Women Beware Women*, and in terms of Grail symbolism to the quester's encounter with a water nymph at a chess-board castle. This last incident is particularly relevant, I feel, to

what Eliot is doing in the second part of his poem. As far as the symbolism of the chess game is concerned, Hugh Kenner makes the following observations:

Chess is played with Queens and Pawns: the set of pieces mimics a social hierarchy, running from 'The chair she sat in, like a burnished throne,' to 'Goonight Bill. Goonight Lou. Goonight May. Goonight. It is a silent unnerving warfare [...] in which everything hinges on the welfare of the King, the weakest piece on the board, and in this section of the poem invisible (though a 'barbarous king' once forced Philomel). Our attention is focused on the Queen. (Kenner, p.131)

The power to restore the king, therefore, is quite largely dependent on the female characters. The quester himself might be, symbolically, a Knight or Pawn; if the latter, then his journey of adventure results in promotion to, or replacement by, a Queen.

It may be worth noting that, in contrast to the pair of women playing chess in *Women Beware Women*, one of the Grail romances, as summarised by Weston, involves a scene where the hero stops at a strange castle, and inside the hall sees the king, sitting watching two young men playing chess, though it is not explained in the romance whether this has any symbolic value⁴³. What does seem to be happening overall in Eliot's handling of the Grail maiden incidents (namely, Madame Sosostriis, hyacinth garden and "A Game of Chess") is that he is blurring the gender of these characters. It may be that in this third instance this is partly for the sake of compression, so that he can combine the Grail maiden and the Fisher King in the same scene, not necessarily in the same human body (though, arguably, necessarily in the same literary body, as will be discussed in sections 5.21-22). The woman in "A Game of Chess" mixes the question-answering role of a Grail maiden with the enervated stasis of the king himself - the chair like a burnished throne could mark her out as symbolically representative of the king, and the mixture is disastrous, in that

⁴³ *The Quest of The Holy Grail*, p.37. Weston recounts the episode from the *Diu Crone* romance: "In this version the king is old, to all appearance ill, and is found in a goodly hall, all bestrown with roses, for it is summer-time. His vesture is white, cunningly wrought with diaper work of gold, and he is watching two youths playing chess when the Knights enter." The description of the King's clothing may partly explain the "Inexplicable splendour of Ionian white and gold" of St. Magnus Martyr in "The Fire Sermon" (TWL, 1.265), and suggests the church symbolically as one version of the castle to which the quester must return. Grover Smith explains the Ionian white and gold as symbolic of Easter, and draws attention to the church's special significance to the local fishermen and its site on Fish Street Hill (Smith, p.89).

instead of answering the protagonist's questions, she doesn't allow him even to get a word in, instead barraging him with her own questions. Similarly, Mr. Fairlie refuses as far as possible to even grant people interviews, and is obstructive and unhelpful even when this is insisted upon. He holds power over the younger relatives in his charge, but lives - and he shows no sign of dying, despite his hypochondria - only for himself, with not even any prospect of marrying or producing any children of his own; in mythical terms he is the novel's infertile king⁴⁴. In his own words, he is (like one of Eliot's *Hollow Men*) "nothing but a bundle of nerves dressed up to look like a man" (*WIW*, p.370), though in Walter's terms he looks like neither man nor woman. Similarly the figure in "A Game of Chess" is a bundle of nerves dressed up, with the help of her dressing table and lighting effects, to look like a woman; and of course, apart from her hair, we actually see nothing of her to show that she is substantially there. Just as neither character seems a whole man or woman, as human beings generally they are barely living. Indeed, Jewel Spears Brooker and Joseph Bentley have suggested reading the woman in Eliot's scene as a ghost, a cubist composite of the dead women of the passage's literary allusions.⁴⁵

5.17. Lingering in chambers: the woman as siren or Salmacis.

Ghostly or physically real, there is an ambiguity as to whether Eliot's woman is merely another victim of the waste land, or whether she constitutes a threat to the quester, and in these respects she recalls the woman in the doorway in "Rhapsody on a Windy Night". They have in common also the theme of the siren or mermaid character, an aspect generally overlooked in both cases. There is abundant sea imagery in the description of the room, matching the atmosphere created by the "sea-green light" in Mr. Fairlie's room. In the "sad light" of the woman's room, "a carved

⁴⁴ His hypochondria parodies Christian resurrection myth: "When I am totally prostrated (did I mention I was totally prostrated by Marian's letter?) it always takes me three days to get up again" (*WIW*, p.368). Collins additionally names the villain of his novel "Sir Percival", who is the most usual hero of Grail romances. It seems unlikely that Collins was unaware of this irony, indeed there are other parallels with the Grail theme, such as Walter and Marian's quest ending in the eventual location of the book's secret in a country church - fittingly enough being proof that Sir Percival is not legally entitled to his title. The Arthurian Grail and waste land theme is hardly obscure in the mid- to late-Victorian era, as evidenced by Tennyson's *Idylls of the King* and "Morte D'Arthur", Hardy's *The Mayor of Casterbridge*, and of course much of the work of William Morris and the Pre-Raphaelites.

⁴⁵ Jewel Spears Brooker and Joseph Bentley, *Reading The Waste Land: Modernism and the Limits of Interpretation*, (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1990), pp.105-112.

dolphin swam”, an allusion to Shakespeare’s Antony⁴⁶, who is, in this context, only seemingly in his element of water, in fact in an illusory substitute created by the light. And the light itself is created by the artificial treatment of copper salts in the flames. What is actually being burned is indeed derived from the water, “sea-wood”, but this has its own sinister connotations. As far as I am aware, the possible meaning and significance of the phrase “sea-wood” is not usually considered by critics, perhaps understandably in view of the general overload of the senses that the poet tries to effect in the passage as a whole. It could mean simply dead branches of trees, dragged up and strewn on the shore, as in the example, again, of “Rhapsody on a Windy Night” (section 3.3). That might itself carry threatening connotations with regard to the drowned phallus, in psychological terms, or the Osiris/Adonis/Dead god effigy in the mythical sense. The only other source for the wood that I can think of, (which itself complements rather than invalidates the first,) is that it comes from the timbers of wrecked ships. In this sense she represents the siren attempting to waylay the hero (“Stay with me. / Speak to me.”ll.112-12.), whose charms are fed by the material of previous destruction. In view of the general tendency to identify this woman as Sosostri’s “Belladonna, [...] / The lady of situations” (ll.49-50), it is as well to recall that she is also called “The Lady of the Rocks”(l.49), which is a give-away in terms of shipwreck imagery well before we even reach this part of the poem. This scene gives substance, in remnants, to the drowning of the Phoenician Sailor, “your card”, predicted in line 47 and the description of the change of one such (or perhaps the very same) sailor, Phlebas, in “Death by Water”, Part IV.

The change of form and use that the wood has undergone, from safeguarding the seaman to threatening him, is one of several examples of sea transformation that Eliot uses, both in this poem and in others such as “Prufrock”, “Mr. Appollinax”, and “The Dry Salvages”. In large part this may have derived from his own experiences of sailing on the American coast as a child and young man. He seems to have been haunted by Ariel’s Dirge in Shakespeare’s *Tempest*, where the supposedly drowned king “doth suffer a sea-change/ Into something rich and strange / Hourly sea-nymphs ring his knell, / Ding-Dong / Hark! now I hear them - / Ding-dong bell.”⁴⁷. His own

⁴⁶ “His delights were dolphin-like”, *Antony and Cleopatra*, V. ii. 88-89.

⁴⁷ *The Tempest*, I. ii. 400-04.

literary criticism uses on occasion the imagery of poetic creation as something rising from the depths of the imaginative sea⁴⁸; indeed, he lifts the line “Those are pearls that were his eyes” from the dirge to use twice in *The Waste Land* (l.48 and l.125), the second occurring in “A Game of Chess” in the strained “conversation” after the description of the room. Just as it may be ship’s timbers being burnt to produce the strange submarine light in the room, so the jewels that pour from the satin cases may symbolise the transformed remnants of previous visitors to the room. We may recall a precedent for this in the early poem, “Circe’s Palace”, where the flowers “sprang from the limbs of the dead” and the feathers in the tails of the peacocks display “the eyes/ Of men we knew long ago”(PWIEY, p.26; see section 2.4). I shall be suggesting an additional symbolic significance of the pearls-as-eyes in my discussion of “Death by Water”, with regard to a possible identity of the drowned man, but the water nymph or siren herself is of great interest here, evoking as she does the *Metamorphoses* story of Salmacis and Hermaphroditus (*Metamorphoses*, IV, ll.285-388).

This tale describes yet another water transformation. Salmacis is a water nymph, or naiad, who neglects to go hunting with Diana, unlike the other naiads, preferring instead to spend her days admiring herself in her pool of clear water. She sees a son of Hermes (Apollo) and Aphrodite (Venus), falls in love with him, and tries to seduce him. He resists, but when he thinks she has left, is charmed by the beauty of the pool and dives in. She follows and seizes hold of him in the water, then prays to the gods that “no day may ever come that shall separate him from me or me from him” (“et istum / nulla dies a me nec me deducat ab isto”, ll.371-72). As they are wont to do in dealing with human prayers, the gods take her precisely at her word and merge the two into one body, so that they are neither male nor female, and yet both, in a single body (“nec duo sunt et forma duplex, nec femina dici / nec puer ut possit, neutrumque et utrumque videntur” ll.377-78). Hermaphroditus, as we of

⁴⁸Of Coleridge’s “Kubla Khan” Eliot writes “The imagery of that fragment, certainly, whatever its origins in Coleridge’s reading, sank to the depths of Coleridge’s feeling, was saturated, transformed there - ‘those are pearls that were his eyes’ - and brought up into daylight again” He furthers the analogy with regard to Shakespeare: “Again and again, in his use of a word, he will give new meaning or extract a latent one; again and again the right imagery saturated while it lay in the depths of Shakespeare’s memory, will rise like Anadyomene from the sea” (*UOP*, pp. 146-147). With further regard to Venus Anadyomene, see my sections 4.6 and 5.33.

course know him/her in retrospect, is very unhappy about the change, and prays to Hermes and Aphrodite that “whoever comes into this pool as a man, may he leave it as a half-man, and may he weaken at the touch of the water”. (““quisquis in hos fontes vir venerit, exeat inde/ semivir et tactis subito mollescat in undis”(Il.385-86). The parents accordingly charge Salmacis’s pool with this power.

The change is, of course, described in terms of Hermaphroditus becoming lessened as a male, “semivir” - half-man, with Salmacis and the female half ending up subsumed by the male in terms of their part in a speaking consciousness⁴⁹, though obviously not in anatomical terms. Thus, overall Hermaphroditus relates to the hermaphrodite elements in *The Waste Land* not just as their mythical archetype, but also in terms of the imagery of a change by water, and the involvement of water nymphs. As to whether Eliot was definitely using the Salmacis/Hermaphroditus myth as a symbolic source, it is reasonable to assume that he would have known of it, such is his familiarity with the other stories from *Metamorphoses* displayed in this poem alone. And in any case, Ovid’s tale is demonstrably “in” the third part of *The Waste Land*, via another poet’s incorporation and transformation of it in a work that Eliot is in turn himself transforming therein. But I will discuss that in due course.

5.18. The ghost of “Lamia” in “A Game of Chess”.

Of the possible main influences on this part of the poem, Keats’s “Lamia” (1820) stands out above all others in its parallels of theme, scene, mythic symbolism and in its strong verbal echoes⁵⁰. Eliot appears to be attempting nothing short of a rewrite of the central part of that poem - and its influence will recur in Parts III and V of *The Waste Land*. Here is a brief summary of the poem; I will point out directly some parallels with Eliot’s scene - others seem to me to be self-evident.

Lamia, a nymph, having been turned into a snake by Hera for having an affair with Zeus, is transformed back into female form by Apollo, in return for telling him the whereabouts of another nymph that he is chasing (and upon whom the snake has placed a charm of invisibility). Lamia catches the eye of a young man called Lycius in

⁴⁹ An imbalance that is paralleled in Eliot’s Saint Narcissus, who, when he is incarnate as a girl, is still himself (see section 4.4).

⁵⁰ *Poetical Works*, ed. H. Buxton Forman (London: Oxford University Press, 1924), pp.171-93.

the woods, but flees, and they meet properly for the first time in Corinth when he is leaning at the porch of the temple of Venus on the night before the feast of Adonis - that date, of course is relevant to *The Waste Land* ⁵¹. It is a night when "Men, women, rich and poor, in the cool hours, / Shuffled their sandals o'er the pavement white, / Companioned or alone; while many a light / Flared, here and there, from wealthy festivals, / And threw their moving shadows on the walls." (I. ll.355-58. Cf. "Footsteps shuffled on the stair. / Under the firelight (...) "TWL ll.107-08; cf. also the opening lines of "What the Thunder Said"). It is a rather gloomy scene, "all her populous streets and temples lewd / Muttered, like tempest in the distance brewed" (I. ll.353-54.), and the shuffling feet evoke also the crowd flowing over London Bridge in "The Burial of the Dead" as well as the Rhapsode's walk on the night of All Souls in "Rhapsody on a Windy Night". The funereal quality is merely the other side of the coin from the licentiousness which anticipates (or uses as an excuse) the resurrection of Adonis.

Behind this backdrop of festival and ritual withdraw Lamia and Lycius, to a "purple-lined palace of sweet sin". It is important to note that Lamia refuses to tell Lycius her name. The next day, Lycius is roused from his state of passion by the sound of trumpets outside (celebrating Adonis's resurrection). Lamia's response to this distraction is reminiscent of the clinging uneasiness of Eliot's woman:

The lady, ever watchful, penetrant,
Saw this with pain, so arguing a want
Of something more, more than her empery
Of joys; and she began to moan and sigh
Because he mused beyond her, knowing well
That but a moment's thought is passion's passing bell. ⁵²
"Why do you sigh, fair creature?" whispered he:
"Why do you think?" return'd she tenderly:
"You have deserted me; - where am I now?
"Not in your heart while care weighs on your brow:" (II. ll.34-43)

⁵¹ The main action of both "Lamia" and "Hero and Leander" and *The Waste Land* are set during the feast of Adonis, where the feast of Adonis may also be read, in the case of Eliot's poem, as referring also to Osiris, Attis, Christ, indeed almost any vegetation god.

⁵² Cf. "Burbank": "Defunctive music under sea / Passed seawards with the passing bell / Slowly. The God Hercules / Had left him that had loved him well" (ECP, p.42).

Lycius reveals his desire to marry her and show her off to the city, taking her through the streets of Corinth in her bridal carriage (II.11.57-64), and she consents, though reluctantly; she would prefer instead that they stay sequestered in the room. In a sense, this forms an ironic contrast to the situation in Eliot's poem, where the male fears the woman going out into the street "exactly as I am" and embarrassing him; any joint excursion should be in "a closed car" to avoid attention. In both poems, the male desires escape from the room, though in Keats' it is only intended briefly, and with the full expectation of returning to even greater happiness; Eliot's figure seeks a more permanent release, apparently aware of his forerunner's eventual fate, and not eager to re-enact it.

While Lycius is gone, Lamia prepares the place for the marriage ceremony and reception, using her magical powers "to dress / The misery in fit magnificence". The lengthy description of the room (II. 11.115-45) seems to me reminiscent again of Eliot's room. Here, I would just point out the echoes of Keats' line "And shut the chamber up, close, hush'd and still" to be found in lines 96 and 100 of Eliot's poem, reproduced above. Eliot's extravagant description of the scents filling the room, too, is pungently evocative of Lamia's own concoction of similar substances⁵³, so much so that Graves and Riding compared the two passages solely with regard to perfumes, making the droll judgement that Eliot's lines "are an improvement on all previous treatments of [this] favourite refined topic. [...] How pale indeed is Keats beside him" (Graves and Riding, pp.170-71). They do not pursue the possible significance of the resemblance, probably because they identify Eliot's allusive technique as essentially a satiric device.

Finally, the wedding takes place, to which Lycius' older friend and mentor Apollonius turns up, uninvited. Apollonius suspects Lamia, and his gaze makes her

53 Of wealthy lustre was the banquet-room,
 Fill'd with pervading brilliance and perfume:
 Before each lucid fuming panel stood
 A censer fed with myrrh and spiced wood,
 Each by a sacred tripod held aloft,
 Whose slender feet wide-swerved upon the soft
 Wool-woofed carpets: fifty wreaths of smoke
 From fifty censers their light voyage took
 To the high roof, still mimick'd as they rose
 Along the mirror'd walls by twin clouds odorous. (II. 11.173-82)

grow pale. Lycius tells Apollonius to avert his eyes or be struck blind by the gods, ascribing to him “impious proud-hearted sophistries, / Unlawful magic and enticing lies”, and calls upon his friends to “Mark how, possess’d his lashless eyelids stretch / around his demon eyes ! Corinthians, see! / My sweet bride withers at their potency”. Apollonius, however, names Lamia, she vanishes and Lycius dies. As Margaret Hallissy points out, the usual plot outcome of a Lamia folktale would not include the death of the male protagonist; instead “the youth becomes or remains a disciple of his deliverer, and presumably stays away henceforth from sexual pleasures”⁵⁴. Keats’ “Lamia” is more ambiguous as far as with whom the reader will identify is concerned: “In literature, lamia characters are almost always presented sympathetically”(Hallissy, p.92).

Apollonius can destroy Lamia by naming her, since “in word magic, to know the name of a being is to know its essence”(Hallissy, p.116), but in the context of Keats’ poem this seems unjust and inaccurate: Lycius himself has identified her as “My silver planet, both of eve and morn!” (II. 1.48), that is, Venus. The use of this particular double - and paradoxical - metaphor for Venus is quite apt, raising the question of how far Lycius and Apollonius’ individual perceptions of what Lamia represents can be reconciled, both with each other and with the Lamia herself who lies underneath her appearances as snake or as beautiful nymph. Indeed this dual definition of Venus, the central example used in Gottlob Frege’s discussion of reference and meaning in “Sinn und Bedeutung”⁵⁵, is to be relevant to Eliot’s technique and theme of reversal in his treatment of the Venus and Adonis myth in “The Fire Sermon”. Apollonius himself, as his name suggests, is representative of order and wisdom, and yet he causes disaster by naming Lamia, when the reader has no reason to suspect of her of evil intent. Instead of *Lamia*, Lycius views *Apollonius* as the snake - “his lashless eyelids / around his demon eyes”, which parallels the “lidless eyes” that will be pressed in Eliot’s “A Game of Chess” (l.138)⁵⁶. Eliot

⁵⁴ *Venomous Woman: Fear of the Female in Literature* (Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood, 1987), p.92.

⁵⁵“On Sinn and Bedeutung” (1892), *The Frege Reader*, ed. Michael Beaney, transl. Max Black (Oxford and Malden Massach: Blackwell, 1997), pp.151-71; pp.152, 156, 160-61.

⁵⁶The “lidless eyes” may also be related to Dante Gabriel Rossetti’s poem 63 in *The House of Life*:
 May not this ancient room thou sits’t in dwell
 In separate living souls for joy or pain?

appears to suggest that both the man and the woman will have such eyes, implying a shared guilt in a combination of the serpent as both devious, alluring Eve and the sinuous, “male” logician, Satan.

The role of Apollonius will be considered further with relation to that of Tiresias in “The Fire Sermon”. Here, it remains both to note the overall similarity of Eliot’s scene in the room to descriptions in the “lamia” *folklore* genre as a whole, and also the key aspects in which he differs from his *literary*, “Lamia” model. Hallissy gives as an example the story of a dragon-lamia to be found in Sir John Mandeville’s *The Travels of Sir John Mandeville*, set in a castle by the sea, wherein a young man finds “a damsel combing her hair and looking in a mirror, and she had much treasure round her”⁵⁷. As we have seen elsewhere in Eliot’s poetry, and as can be seen also in the Victorian literature whence he derives the image, the hair is “a symbol of entrapment”, and the strange life of the hair in “A Game of Chess” may be related to the idea of Medusa’s hair serpents (Hallissy, p.98); they have the effect of rendering Eliot’s male mute or of turning his eyes to (pearl) stone. (It may be that, as in the classical Medusa myth, the male can only look at the woman indirectly, in a reflective surface, hence the hidden eyes of one the cupidons holding up the glass. As I mentioned above, *that* image may also be another reference to Marlowe’s Hero: “Some say, for her the fairest cupid pined, / And looking in her face, was strooken blind”) In this respect, the scene in “A Game of Chess” combines the Keatsian lamia story with the related *mermaid*-lamia elements I have discussed with regard to the influence of *The Woman in White* and the story of Salmacis. But what is of particular significance to Hallissy in her consideration of the *snake*-lamia, and which has again been relevant to the discussion of Marian and Mr. Fairlie above, is that creature’s symbolism of a kind of phallic woman:

Nay, all its corners may be painted plain
Where Heaven shows pictures of some life spent well
And may be stamped a memory all in vain,
Upon the sight of lidless eyes in hell. (ll.9-14)

Dante Gabriel Rossetti: *An Anthology*, selected by F. L. Lucas (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1933), p.163.

Although “lidless” may just mean “wide with horror”, the anatomical specificity of both Keats’ and Rossetti’s eyes - they could have used “staring”, for instance - strongly suggests to me an additional reptilian sense.

⁵⁷ *The Travels of Sir John Mandeville*, transl. by C. W. R. D. Moseley (New York, Penguin, 1983), p.54, cited by Hallissy, p.97.

Identification of serpent and phallus as male principles of generation is an ancient motif in art and folklore. When woman and serpent are combined, the result is a complex combination of the problems inherent in both male and female sexuality. As woman, the lamia dominates a man by virtue of the power of her sexuality. As serpent, she embodies a man's fears of his own sexuality as well. (Hallissy, pp.92-93)

The room, then, appears to present both a claustrophobic womb-like atmosphere and a phallic woman at its centre, and Calvin Bedient detects insistent suggestions of castration-anxiety in the passage: in the cupidon hiding his eyes, in the lidless eyes already mentioned, in the way that "the synthetic woman (the false mother), in a development from the hyacinth girl's armful of picked flowers, has surrounded herself with cut and carved things. Here, where female "vials" are insidiously "Unstoppered," sea-wood has been chopped or broken into pieces and is being turned into ashes"(Bedient, pp.82-83).

Graves' and Riding's mention of the possible influence of "Lamia" on Eliot's poem was picked up by Giorgio Melchiori, who expands the point further to a general consideration of the sensuality of the respective passages⁵⁸. In turn, Leonard Unger rebukes Melchiori as "too ready" in his crediting of Graves and Riding, and proposes that the real significance of the allusion to "Lamia" lies in Fitzgerald's echoing of Keats' poem in his own "Segismund", where he also, more crucially to Unger, echoes Book IV of Milton's *Paradise Lost*⁵⁹. Whilst Unger's discussion of "A Game of Chess" is, like Melchiori's, interesting and in many ways useful, by viewing "Lamia" as merely a conduit to a more important influence, and by only identifying the banquet hall description as being relevant, he, too, misses the more important similarities, in terms of plot, theme, symbol and verbal echo, between the whole of "Lamia" and the whole of *The Waste Land*. He is quite correct, I think, to suggest that "one of Eliot's purposes in "A Game of Chess" was indeed to "awaken many echoes"", but I think he limits his own scope by seeing the sources he would include, of which Keats' poem is one, as being related to each other mainly as examples of

⁵⁸*The Tightrope Walkers: Studies of Mannerism in Modern English Literature* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1956), pp.54-69.

⁵⁹*Eliot's Compound Ghost: Influence and Confluence* (University Park, Pennsylvania, and London: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1981), pp.45-60.

“garden and banquet scenes” from all periods of literature, stretching back to antiquity (Unger, p.59). “Segismund”, whose importance Unger extols at great length, strikes me as of possible minor influence, if any, on Eliot’s scene. The problem with positing Fitzgerald’s poem, or indeed Book IV of *Paradise Lost*, or Shakespeare’s Cleopatra on her barge, as the main influences in Part II of Eliot’s poem is that they relate principally to the description of the room, not so much to the following depiction of the speech and situation of the two human beings inside it, in lines (ll.111-38). As I hope has been shown, the correspondences between “A Game of Chess” and both its “human” origin Hero, and “Lamia” and *The Woman in White*, go somewhat beyond this.

Despite his extensive utilisation of “Lamia” by way of plot, symbol, and verbal echo, Eliot’s treatment of the lamia theme here (as, partly, elsewhere⁶⁰) may also be said to be running contrary to his Keatsian model, and has the effect of largely re-inscribing the folk-tale pattern from which Keats deliberately deviated; the lamia becomes once again a rather frightening figure. But at the same time, there is an acknowledgement of a shared guilt and pain with Eliot’s couple. In a dry, literary sense, Eliot may be said here to be correcting Keats’ romantic sympathies for the

⁶⁰Eliot’s early “On a Portrait” (1909; *PWIEY*, p.27) characterises the female subject of a painting in the following manner:

Not like a tranquil goddess carved of stone
 But evanescent as if one should meet
 A pensive lamia in some wood-retreat,
 An immaterial fancy of one’s own.

No meditations glad or ominous
 Disturb her lips, or move the slender hands;
 Her dark eyes keep their secrets hid from us,
 Beyond the circle of our thought she stands. (ll.5-12)

This use of the lamia figure is not quite in the Keatsian/Swinburnian manner - she is not idealised with some erotic romantic mystique - but nor is it hostile or dismissive. “Evanescent” and “immaterial” as she is, there is nevertheless a sympathy here between the pensive poem and the pensive lamia. The usual mythical stereotypes are considered, but not imposed, and instead of being altered to fit the fears or desires of the narrator, she is accepted as being unknowable. The prose poem “Hysteria” (1917; *ECP*, p.34), by contrast, alludes to the lamia folk myth in a more typical way, with the woman’s uncontrollable laughter characterised as threatening and snake-like: “I was drawn in by short gasps, inhaled at each momentary recovery, lost finally in the dark caverns of her throat, bruised by the ripple of unseen muscles”. Here, the revulsion may be connected with the narrator’s own awareness “of becoming involved in her laughter and being a part of it”. As he is passively drawn into the hysterical “feminine” behaviour, so she is correspondingly invested with the phallic femininity that Hallissy identifies as the lamia’s compelling and disturbing essence.

lamia in favour of the more austere classical and medieval view. But this is perhaps to do him an injustice. The loveless horror of this scene has been very widely postulated as being drawn directly from Eliot's own experiences in his first and unhappy marriage. If this is the case, then even here, his instinct for the precise objective correlative allusion is as cool and calm as anywhere else in his work; there is a poignancy in the similarities between accounts of Eliot's marriage and the standard plot characteristics of the standard lamia tale, as defined by Margaret Hallissy:

The young man is called to make a daring choice in risking a relationship with an unusual woman. [...] The hero must examine himself as well, especially his capacity to risk social disapproval. Because of the inherent caution of his own nature, he is likely to listen to the voices of the mentor figures. But to save the lamia, and to become his own best self, he must go against all warnings and make the daring choice. Most often, he fails by retreating from the challenge the lamia presents. (Hallissy, p.93)

Marriage was Eliot's one memorable act of daring self-surrender.

(Gordon, p.68)

5.19. Allusion as provenance and phantasm.

The list of analogues for "A Game of Chess" continues. We could, for instance, add Edgar Allan Poe's story "The Assigination" (1840), another tale of a doomed couple, wherein the narrator's description of a luxurious room effortlessly asserts itself as an important Eliotic source:

The eye wandered from object to object and rested upon none - neither the grotesques of the Greek painters, nor the sculptures of the best Italian days, nor the huge carvings of untutored Egypt. Rich draperies in every part of the room trembled to the vibration of low, melancholy music, whose origin was not to be discovered. The senses were oppressed by mingled and conflicting perfumes, reeking up from strange convolute censers, together with multitudinous flaring and flickering tongues of emerald and violet fire. The rays of the newly risen sun poured in upon the whole through windows, formed each one of a single pane of crimson-tinted glass. Glancing to and fro, in a thousand reflections, from curtains which rolled from their cornices like cataracts of molten silver, the beams of natural glory mingled at length fitfully with the artificial light, and lay weltering in subdued masses upon a carpet of rich, liquid-looking cloth of Chili gold.⁶¹

The similarity is once again baffling. The proprietor's pride in his room's uniqueness, by contrast, is ironic beyond his comprehension:

⁶¹ Poe, *Selected Tales* (London: Penguin, 1994), pp.35-47 (pp.40-41).

'I see you are astonished at my apartment - at my statues - my pictures - my originality of conception in architecture and upholstery! Absolutely drunk, eh, with my magnificence? But pardon me, my dear sir. [...] pardon me for my uncharitable laughter. You appeared so utterly astonished!' (Poe, p.41)

It is hard to know whether the guest should suppress a gasp or a yawn. If the woman in "A Game of Chess" can be characterised as predatory, then so can the passage as a whole. So many analogues seem to constitute it, each appearing to be the "onlie begetter" and each being exposed as merely one of a number of copies of the same art object. And there is a peculiarity to the syntax of Eliot's description that emphasises such an association with antiques and *objets d'art*. The whole description of the room ("The Chair [...] the room enclosed") consists of just six sentences, of which the first three take up twenty lines. This long, meandering style of description is reminiscent of no other linguistic idiom as that of auction catalogues, where typically the description consists of a single (very long, if necessary,) sentence. Here are a couple of examples:

**239 A CONTINENTAL MAJOLICA
CENTREPIECE AND COVER**

circa 1880

the bowl applied with masks and grotesque figures of naked maidens rising from foliage to form handles, raised on a stem with portrait medallions strung with garlands above shaped circular foot with formal borders, the cover surmounted by a cupid holding a bow and a quiver of arrows, the whole predominantly in brown, green and blue

impressed numerals, 43.2cm; 17in, some chips and restoration

(2)

£300-400

**247 A MEISSEN GROUP OF AMPHITRITE
late 19th Century**

the goddess seated in a cockle shell car drawn by two Nereids, scantily draped with a yellow sash scattered with gilt stars and billowing over her head, a putto on a dolphin to her left, a young triton blowing a conch horn to her right, the whole on a rocky and wavy-strewn base applied with shells

crossed swords in underglaze blue, incised and impressed numerals, 23cm; 9in, the putto and some other pieces loose, some pieces missing

£500-700

Such catalogue entries are intended to fulfil two almost contradictory requirements. On the one hand, the entry must present the piece reasonably favourably as a desirable object, but on the other hand it must be extremely precise for purposes of identification, especially if someone is buying from the catalogue and not present at the actual auction. If the piece was subsequently auctioned again, the new catalogue entry would in all probability be almost identical to the original - since the work's provenance must be traceable and there is no place for falsifying embellishment or omission, the inventorial idiom of auction catalogues (like that of heraldry) consequently remains unchanging over decades and even centuries, and thus always appears somewhat archaic in style: the examples given above are in fact from a 1994 catalogue⁶². What Eliot does, in a sense, with his description in "A Game of Chess" is to write an auction entry whose explicit purpose is to identify itself *as* the description of Hero, *as* the passage from Cymbeline, *as* Mr Fairlie's room, and so on, and all of *them* as the same piece. What may on the one hand be viewed, perfectly validly, as a description running away with itself, of language as excess, of allusion as multivalent, can also be viewed as the opposite, as the controlled and comprehensive making of an inventory. All that Eliot omits is a price tag.

How Eliot manages to condense all these *objets d'art* into one can seem almost a trick of hallucination on the part of the reader, and it is this hallucinatory quality which becomes the defining theme of the final analogue that I wish to mention. It is Leonardo's *Mona Lisa*, or, rather, Walter Pater's meditation upon it in his book *The Renaissance* (1873)⁶³:

We all know the face and hands of the figure, set in its marble chair, in that circle of fantastic rocks, as in some faint light under sea.. Perhaps of all ancient pictures time has chilled it least. The presence that rose thus so strangely besides the waters, is expressive of what in the ways of a thousand years men had come to desire. Hers is the head upon which all "the ends of the world are come," and the eyelids are a little weary [...] set it for a moment

⁶² Sotheby's, *European Ceramics & Glass and Applied Arts* (auction catalogue), London, 15th March 1994, p.19.

⁶³ "Leonardo da Vinci", in *The Renaissance: Studies in Art and Poetry* (London: Macmillan, 1913), pp.98-129 (pp.124-25).

beside one of those Greek goddesses or beautiful women of antiquity, and how would they have been troubled by this beauty, into which the soul with all its maladies has passed! All the thoughts and experience of the world have etched and moulded there, in that which they have of power to refine and make expressive the outward form, the animalism of Greece, the lust of Rome, the mysticism of the Middle Age with its spiritual ambition and imaginative loves, the return of the Pagan world, the sins of the Borgias. She is older than the rocks among which she sits; like the vampire, she has been dead many times, and learned the secrets of the grave; and has been a diver in deep seas, and keeps their fallen day about her; and trafficked for strange webs with Eastern merchants, and, as Leda, was the mother of Helen of Troy, and, as Saint Anne, the mother of Mary; and all this has been to her as the sound of lyres and flutes, and lives only in the delicacy with which it has moulded the changing lineaments, and tinged the eyelids and the hands. (Pater, pp.124-25)

Over fifty years later, W. B. Yeats introduced his *Oxford Book of Modern Verse 1892-1935* with a reproduction of Pater's "description" in *vers libre* form, justifying its anachronistic inclusion on the grounds of its "revolutionary importance": "this passage which dominated a generation, a domination so great that all over Europe from that day to this men shrink from Leonardo's masterpiece as from an over-flattered woman"⁶⁴. Indeed, in his essay "The Critic as Artist" (1891) Oscar Wilde had offered it as the prime example of "criticism of the highest kind"⁶⁵. The character Gilbert describes how, confronted with the actual painting, he and a friend automatically start reciting fragments of Pater's description, and while frankly acknowledging that Leonardo might well have been baffled by such a summing up of the work's aims and themes, nevertheless justifies Pater's reverie as more significant than any hypothetical discussion of form and colour by the artist himself:

and it is for this reason that the criticism which I have quoted is criticism of the highest kind. It treats the work of art simply as a starting point for a new a new creation. It does not confine itself - let us suppose so for the moment - to discovering the real intention of the artist and accepting that as final. And in this it is right, for the meaning of any beautiful created thing is, at least, as much in the soul of him who looks at it, as was in his soul who wrought it. Nay, it is rather the beholder who lends to the beautiful thing its myriad meanings, and makes it marvelous for us, and sets it in some new relation to the age, so that it becomes a vital portion of our lives, and symbol of what we

⁶⁴ *The Oxford Book of Modern Verse 1892-1935*, ed. William Butler Yeats (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1935), pp.1, viii.

⁶⁵ "The Critic as Artist", in *The Complete Works of Oscar Wilde* (London and Glasgow: Collins, 1966), pp.1009-59 (p.1029).

pray for, or perhaps of what, having prayed for, we fear that we may receive.
(Wilde, p.1029)

It is indeed quite likely that Leonardo's own explanation of his painting might have been dull and of little value, and Eliot himself would not have privileged the artist's stated intention over useful critical inference, but it is a fair bet that Pater's description - and Wilde's and Yeats's seconding of it - would have caused apoplexy in him: it is likely that this one of the parts of *The Renaissance* that provoked Eliot's comment, referred to at the start of this study, on Pater confusing life and art, with harmful consequences⁶⁶. Wilde is putting forward one of the first and most notable arguments for precisely the kind of free reader association that Eliot's allusive method was intended to fight back against and restrict. Pater's web of associations blatantly has practically nothing to tell us about the work itself, and yet one can see how it proved so influential. It is also unapologetic in its Romanticism, a nightmare parallel of Eliot's own Tradition of European culture, following a meandering course of sweet - or sour, according to taste - decadence.

Pater's description must have been an unavoidable analogue for Eliot, so closely does it overlap with regard to the Lady of the Rocks, the Eastern merchants (the drowned Phoenician sailor is present in the woman's jewellery in the form of his pearl eyes), the sea light and the marble throne/throne on the marble). It is even arguable that he could not help here but set up an allusive connection, even if he had never read the Pater. But Eliot's final product rules out any ideological kinship with Pater - the decadence here is sinister, and more importantly sterile and exhausted, rather than sweet. Eliot's contraction of the woman herself into mere fiery points of hair and a neurotic voice, as well as his pointed emphasis upon her dressing table as the originating point of her construction, could be understood - in addition to the other approaches I have suggested - not simply as an expression of misogyny, but also as a kind of revenge on Pater and decadent Romantic free association.

⁶⁶ SE, p.442; see section 1.1.

IV

5.20. Concealment of the male by the literary voice.

I have attempted to suggest that there is a “dead man” or “maimed king” implied in the first half of “A Game of Chess” as a parallel to the enervated or enervating woman. Barely existing in the physical sense, “she” is conjured out of the synthesis of sensory effects and literary echoes. We are, nevertheless, told more about her than we are about the presumed male character in the scene. Carol Christ considers Eliot’s characterisation of gender in the poem thus:

In this collage Eliot gives the women of the poem the attributes of traditional literary character. They inhabit settings, they exist in dramatic situations, they have individual histories and they have voices. They constitute most of the identified figures in the first three sections of the poem, and they contain among them a number of figures for the poet: the sibyl of Cumae; Mme Sosostriis, Fresca⁶⁷ [...] and La Pia⁶⁸. [...] One might appropriately object that these are for the most part satiric portraits (indeed, some of them savagely satiric), but they are nonetheless the ways in which the poem locates both verbal fluency and prophetic authority.

In contrast, the male voice through which Eliot presents these women has none of the definitional attributes of conventionally centered identity. It resists location in time and space, it conveys emotion through literary quotation, and it portrays experience only through metaphoric figuration. [...] The very lack of location and attribute seems to place the speaker beyond the dilemmas of personality, as if Eliot had succeeded in creating the objective voice of male tradition. But for all this voice seems to offer, the early parts of the poem imagine men as dead or dismembered. [...] Thus Eliot allows us to read the sublimation of body and personality that mark the poem’s voice as a repression of them as well, an escape from dismemberment by removing the male body from the text.⁶⁹

I agree almost entirely; I do think, however, that it may be worthwhile to distinguish between the kinds of death or dismemberment suffered, as there are distinct symbolic significances attached. Simply put, the involvement of water in the death or

⁶⁷A Popeian “maudlin poetess” described in the early drafts of “The Fire Sermon”, and discussed in my consideration of that part of the poem.

⁶⁸She, if she exists, seems to have been given this name by the general consensus of some critics. This, and the fixing of the equally nameless woman in “A Game of Chess” as “Belladonna”, appear to be academic *faits accomplis*, which have had a rather restrictive effect on attempts to examine the characters in terms of any other possible symbolic representatives. (I am not disputing the rightness and usefulness of viewing Belladonna as *one of* the number of possible identities represented by the woman in “A Game of Chess”.)

⁶⁹“Gender, Voice, and Figuration in Eliot’s Early Poetry”, in *T. S. Eliot: The Modernist in History*, ed. Ronald Bush (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), pp.23-37 (pp.31-32).

injury seems to be worse than death on land. As the Hermaphroditus story suggests water may threaten as much for its transformative powers as from simply drowning people. The body in the earth may not be resurrected, but it is at least left relatively in peace, whereas the living element of water effects changes beyond human control: to have one's dead eyes turned into pearls is in one sense wonderful, but in another horrific, allowing one to be used by others long after one's death. It is a half-life over which one has less control, even, than the undead crowds in London have over theirs. The horror of an "incomplete" death is an attitude that was very likely fed in Eliot's mind by the fact that the body of his friend, Verdenal, was not actually found, and he was merely presumed to have been mixed in the mud of Gallipoli, in neither the one element of earth nor the other of water. Further to the significance of watery deaths, the irony, of course, is that such a strange transformation is precisely what Eliot has performed on other literary works in order to make the poem itself, so that the fear of a fluid state in death found in the poem might, in part, be argued as an articulation of the poet's own feelings of fear or guilt towards the literary tradition. Water, then, represents both the dissolution and transformation of the male by the female, and that of literature by the poet. The latter seems to be intended as a talisman against the former. Finally, in addition to this ambivalent stance towards water, one should acknowledge the fairly obvious symbolism of water as representative of spiritual change, something that must be undergone, even at the cost of "drowning" the old self. But I will discuss that further with relation to part V.

5.21. Revelation and re-membering of the male by the literary voice: the Jacobean allusions.

Following Carol Christ's main argument, though, it would appear that the male in the poem is mainly (or solely) to be given "form" by means of literary echoes, and that this form will be consequently vocal but non-corporeal. As I have said, I think this is a sound analysis, and yet a further question needs to be asked: Where has the male body been removed *to*? Christ writes of "escape" and of "removing the male body from the text". This might suggest, figuratively, an outsideness, a movement above and away from, like the freeing of a ghost. Perhaps,

though, one might think of the body as being buried *underneath* the text, and therefore possibly able to be rediscovered and resurrected. There is a particular allusion in “A Game of Chess” that points toward such a recurrent concern in the poem’s male characterisation, as well telling us something about the purpose and practical functioning of Eliot’s Notes system. The example here comes in the conversation in lines 117-20: “‘What is that noise?’/ The wind under the door./ ‘What is that noise now? What is the wind doing?’/ Nothing again nothing.” Now, in his Notes, Eliot directs us “Cf. Webster: ‘Is the wind in that door still?’”. It can be found in the play *The Devil’s Law-Case*⁷⁰, but beyond noting this, few critics seem to consider it worthy of discussion, though B. C. Southam makes the rather odd interpretation that it is the equivalent of our modern “Is that the way the land lies?” or “Is that the way the way the wind blows”⁷¹. It is a considerable, but common, unspoken error, I believe, to read the Jacobean allusions in *The Waste Land* - and in his other poetry - as merely evidence of his own fondness for these authors, using them as “oases of horror” in his “deserts of ennui”. Instead, this example, and the others which I shall discuss in turn, demonstrate a common symbolic theme. The line alluded to is to be found in Act III scene ii of Webster’s play, where two surgeons are talking, in the room where they have laid out the apparently dead body of the character Contarino. Another character, Romelio, visits the place and, pretending to be paying his respects, stabs Contarino to finish him off, but is then discovered by the surgeons, who blackmail him. What they think is only the wind is in fact the breathing of the reviving man, and the manner of his revival is of particular interest. As the first surgeon discovers:

“Ha! Come hither, note a strange accident:
His steel has lighted in the former wound,
And made free passage for the congealed blood.
Observe in what abundance it delivers the putrefaction” (III. ii. 159-62)

⁷⁰ *The Devil’s Law-Case*, ed. Frances A. Shirley (Edward Arnold: London, 1972).

⁷¹ Southam, *A Student’s Guide to the Selected Poems of T. S. Eliot*, 6th edn (London: Faber and Faber, 1994), p.94. Grover Smith notes that Webster’s line “occurs, significantly, in a passage concerning a wounded man”, but does not say what the significance is (Smith, p.81).

And he goes on to ascribe to the events divine assistance: "The hand of heaven is in't,
/ That his intent to kill him should become / The very direct way to save his
life."(ll.164-66).

This last speech particularly calls to mind Eliot's fondness for the paradoxical notions of life-in-death or death-in-life⁷². More importantly, both quotations echo the theme of the death and resurrection of the dead god or maimed king, particularly with regard to the usual conclusion of the Percival story in the Grail romances, where the hero "restores the wounded Amfortas [the maimed king] to health by touching him with the sacred spear, and announces that he is to succeed him as keeper of the Grail."⁷³ This should call to mind the very opening of Frazer's *Golden Bough*, and the usurpation of the priest king in the sacred grove of Diana at Nemi. And that might remind us again of Eliot's own *The Sacred Wood*. In a literary sense, Eliot's use of the Webster as a starting point for one of his own combines the symbolism of both priest king and maimed king into the figure of the poet's ancestor; Webster is simultaneously both resurrected and supplanted in this new text.

Of course, one may argue that for Webster to be resurrected, let alone supplanted - both in the symbolic senses, obviously - depends largely on the perception of the reader. If one fails to recognise an allusion, is this the fault of the reader, or of the author? And can supplying one's own notes be said truly to remedy this? There is another less than straightforward reference to Webster in the Notes to part V.

Eliot refers to the passage "By this, and this only, have we existed / Which is not to be found in our obituaries / Or in memories draped by the beneficent spider / Or under seals broken by the lean solicitor / In our empty rooms" (ll.405-09), specifically to line 407. Eliot's note reads: "Cf. Webster, *The White Devil*, V, vi: '...they'll remarry / Ere the worm pierce your winding-sheet, ere the spider / Make a thin curtain for your epitaphs.'"(*ECP*, p.85). Eliot gives no clue in his note as to the supposed significance of the lines he refers to; particularly, he gives no indication of who "they" are. His note is teasing, an invitation followed by a casual brush-off.

⁷²Cf. "Death is life and life is death" and much of the rest of the poem, in *Sweeney Agonistes* (*ECP*, p.135).

⁷³F. B. Pinion, *A T. S. Eliot Companion* (London: Macmillan, 1986), p.128.

Despite this, Webster's actual lines, or rather, their dramatic context, do merit investigation. They appear in a speech by a character called Iachomo who has supposedly entered into a suicide pact with two women, Vittoria and Zanke. He gives them a gun with which to shoot him and then themselves, but they shoot only him and have no intention of following suit. Apparently dying, he has in fact loaded the gun blank, in order to test the women, and once their true intentions have been revealed he "resurrects" himself, attacking them (verbally) with the speech of which Eliot only gives the end: "O men/ That lye upon your death-beds and are haunted/ With howling wives, neere trust them, they'le remarry ... (etc.)". The scene and speech combine *The Waste Land's* twin concerns of the resurrection of the male and fear of the female.

It may also partly explain the changes Eliot made to other lines from *The White Devil* that famously re-appear at the end of "The Burial of the Dead": Webster's "But keep the wolf far hence, that's foe to men, / For with his nails he'll dig them up again!" become "O keep the Dog far hence, that's friend to men, / Or with his nails he'll dig it up again!". The changes have been subject to varying interpretations: Cleanth Brooks is "inclined to take the Dog (the capital letter is Eliot's) as Humanitarianism, and the related philosophies which, in their concern for man, extirpate the supernatural - dig up the corpse of the buried corpse and thus prevent the rebirth of life."⁷⁴ This is a fair point, and Brooks' discussion as a whole is very interesting, but I think that against this theme of damaging the dead god by a hasty resurrection, one must balance the equally powerful, if not more powerful, one of the need for such a resurrection or revival, in the face of the fear of rebirth that characterises so many of the inhabitants of the waste land. In the Webster dirge, the wolf threatens to desecrate a grave whose inhabitant should be respectfully left in peace - here, the Dog (Why not simply the Dog star, Sirius, harbinger of the summer rains?⁷⁵) threatens to provoke the rebirth which the people of the land cannot face up to.⁷⁶

⁷⁴"The Waste Land: *Critique of the Myth*", in *A Collection of Critical Essays on The Waste Land*, ed. Jay Martin (New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, 1968), pp.52-86 (pp.66-67).

⁷⁵One might also refer to the section on "The Corn-spirit as a Wolf or a Dog" in *The Golden Bough*, Chapter 48.

⁷⁶Pinion interestingly draws attention to a connection between Webster's Dirge and the one in *The Tempest*, which, he speculates, Eliot might have found in a footnote in the Mermaid edition of *The White Devil*. It is a quotation from Charles Lamb comparing the two: "As that is of the water, watery;

5.22. The Corpus in the Library.

When he left Stockholm, and was asked by a reporter for which book he had received his prize, he said he believed that it was for the entire corpus; after being asked when he wrote that, he thought what an excellent title 'The Entire Corpus' would be for a mystery.⁷⁷

Eliot's notes concerning the Jacobean allusions suggest both a desire to impart some additional, secret meaning, as well as a contrary reluctance. They are not as helpful as they might be, and, if I am right, it is hard to say whether they always *are* allusions, rather than wishful thinking, an attempt to impose meaning from outside - or from underneath. The criticism that this suggests a weakness in Eliot's transformation of the elements at his disposal can hardly be opposed, but only if, as I have stressed above, one sees the real purpose of the notes as to be helpful, and the real purpose of the poem to be completely available in its meaning. I have suggested that this may not be the purpose, and the very subject matter of uncovering buried bodies that he seems to have equally "buried" in the text provides a metaphor for Eliot's approach to the poem's buried meanings. We may recall "my buried life" in "Portrait of a Lady" (l.53), which both describes a state of feeling *and* alludes to a poem, "The Buried Life" by Matthew Arnold, (as well as, possibly, George Moore's *Memoirs of My Dead Life*⁷⁸). A "Life" is, of course, a biography as well as an existence, and the religious concept of the human life as a book of deeds, or even an account book, is a familiar one, as is the philosophical notion of the human mind as a blank sheet, a *tabula rasa* on which experience writes itself. The metaphor of the human life as a book is one that has an effect on Eliot, but he seems to have been equally, if not more, interested in using it with a reversal of signifier and signified, so that correspondingly the book, or literature, becomes a kind of life (existence) itself. What his deliberately literal understanding of 'The Entire Corpus' jokingly hints at, Eliot did indeed take seriously in his conception of literature and writers, being adamant that any individual work by an author can only be fully understood by perceiving and experiencing his or her works as a whole. As he writes in "A Note on

so this is of the earth, earthy. Both have that intensiveness of feeling, which seems to resolve itself into the elements which it contemplates" (Pinion, p.124).

⁷⁷Pinion p.51.

⁷⁸*Memoirs of My Dead Life*, 3rd edn (London: Heineman: 1908).

War Poetry”, “a poem is not poetry - / That is a life.”(*ECP*, p.229). Likewise, each author has to be seen as a part of the literary tradition as a whole.

The very title of Eliot’s poem equates the text of the poem itself with a place of death, burial and resurrection, and the corollary of this might be to take the Websterian bodies interred in *The Waste Land* as symbolic, in part, of the “body” of literary tradition. Here we may have to modify Carol Christ’s view, referred to earlier, and which I do think holds good regarding much of Eliot’s poetry, that his work

gives reason to question the Bloomian paradigm of poetic influence, for, at least in his poetry, Eliot tends to cast safely distant voices of the literary tradition, with whom he wishes unabashedly to identify himself, as male, whereas he associates poetic effects of the nineteenth century, far closer to his poetic idiom, with a woman whom the poem in some way involves in a drama of betrayal and appropriation. He thus tends to imagine his relationship to the immediate literary past not as an Oedipal struggle but as a desertion or rape. (Christ, p.27)

I think that in *The Waste Land*, at least, Eliot is perhaps approaching the literary past from *both* of these points of view; Christ’s understanding of Eliot’s gendering of his poetry is subtler than that of most critics, but Eliot *could* also be seen to be enacting in this poem some kind of struggle against his male literary forbears, as in the example of his refiguring Keat’s “Lamia”. At the same time, the struggle is indeed largely carried out by means of the gendering techniques that Christ discusses. This is to be shown again in “The Fire Sermon”.

5.23. A local identity for the King of the Waste Land.

Before moving on to “The Fire Sermon”, I would like to make a fairly brief point concerning the pub scene that is the second half of “A Game of Chess”, and the fisher king we find in parts III and V of the poem. The pub scene itself has been generally read as echoing the main themes of the scene in the room, suggesting that the whole of society, from high to low, is afflicted with the same malaise. The ending, blending the “Goonight”s of the regulars leaving the pub with Ophelia’s “Goodnight ladies, goodnight sweet ladies”(ll.170-72) may be taken as either sympathetic or snobbish on Eliot’s part; I incline to the former view, and I think the scene is also relevant to the London location of the poem, which can tend to be overlooked in

favour of its equally evident European character. It is notable that part III of the poem replaces the original Fresca, a cosmopolitan socialite, with the more local typist and house agent's clerk in the final version. In the waste land of London (though the implication is that all of Europe is in a similar waste state) these characters do not have the option of escape, of going "south in winter".

With this in mind, it is possible to detect one figuration of the fisher king as being a local character, as hinted at by the recurrence of the phrase "those are pearls that were his eyes". Near the start of "The Fire Sermon", a character describes "fishing in the dull canal / On a winter evening round behind the gashouse / Musing upon the king my brother's wreck / And the king my father's death before him." (ll.189-92). Grover Smith describes Brooks' explanation that the fisher king has a brother, the hermit, in Wolfram's *Parzival* as "unconvincing"⁷⁹, but his own interpretation amounts to little more than suggesting Eliot is referring to human brotherhood. But why, then, the necessity of referring to "kings"? It can hardly be referring to George V, but there are other kings to be found in London. My own feeling is that Eliot may be referring to Pearly Kings, the symbolic folk rulers of each of the city's boroughs. Their name comes from the elaborate patterns of pearl buttons sewn onto their costumes - hence, "those are pearls that were his eyes" a memory perhaps triggered by the sight of the dead man's outfit. the king may have been an ordinary soldier in the war, now demobbed like Albert (l.139).

The genesis of the Pearly Kings was as follows: the medieval term costermonger, meaning "apple-seller", broadened to mean sellers of all food produce on the streets of London. In Victorian London, these people set up barrows all over London, and Coster kings and queens arose as a kind of union leadership, protecting the interests and territory of local costermongers. The trend for the pearly outfits arose in the 1870s, with the funeral procession of the original "Pearly King" attracting thousands of mourners in 1930. Eliot's fondness for Marie Lloyd and the Music Hall means he can hardly have failed to be aware of this aspect of London folk culture. He may even have witnessed performances by Albert Chevalier, a well-known coster comedian with a pearl costume, who died only the year after Eliot's poem was

⁷⁹Brooks, p.71, Smith, p.85.

published⁸⁰. I am not attempting to suggest that this is the true, single identity of the poem's protagonist; that identity seems too fluid in any case to be limited in such a way. But I do think a reference to Pearly kings is implied, and the profession of the costermongers certainly lends itself to the symbolism of the potential fruitfulness of the land - here, however, as in the case of the Smyrna merchant, Mr. Eugenides, tainted by the profit motive. One may also include Eliot's fishmen as kinds of costermonger - indeed, the first fish and chip shops were set up by those costermongers who had previously sold cooked fish on their stalls.

V

5.24. "The Fire Sermon": the poet and the female dismembered.

This part of the poem opens with the following desolate imagery:

The river's tent is broken; the last fingers of leaf
Clutch and sink into the wet bank. The wind
Crosses the brown land, unheard. The nymphs are departed.
Sweet Thames, run softly till I end my song.
The river bears no empty bottles, sandwich papers,
Silk handkerchiefs, cardboard boxes, cigarette ends
Or other testimony of summer nights. The nymphs are departed.
And their friends, the loitering heirs of city directors;
Departed, have left no addresses.
By the Waters of Leman I sat down and wept . . .
Sweet Thames, run softly till I end my song,
Sweet Thames, run softly, for I speak not loud or long.
But at my back in a cold blast I hear
The rattle of the bones, and chuckle spread from ear to ear. (ll.173-86)

It is here that the theme of the dismembered or buried male seems to turn back on the figure of the poet himself, as opposed to that of the king; the passage is strongly reminiscent of the aftermath of Orpheus's' murder by the women of the Cicones, as told in Book XI of *Metamorphoses*. I give Frank Justus Miller's translation:

⁸⁰See Peter F. Brooks, *Pearly Kings and Queens in Britain* (Chichester: Barry Rose), 1974.

yes, the trees shed their leaves as if as if so tearing their hair in grief for thee. They say that the rivers also were swollen with their own tears, and that naiads and dryads alike mourned with dishevelled hair and with dark-bordered garments. The poet's limbs lay scattered all around; but his head and lyre, O Hebrus, thou didst receive, and (a marvel!) while they floated in mid steam the lyre gave forth some mournful notes, mournfully the lifeless tongue murmured, mournfully the banks replied. And now, borne onward to the sea, they left their native stream and gained the shore of Lesbos near the city of Methymna.⁸¹

Orpheus has been surprised and butchered while singing his songs, which briefly function as talismans against the attack, but are then overcome by brute force. It is probably fair to say that these lines of Eliot's bring to our consciousness the fullest impression of the voice and consciousness of a poet figure in the poem, and it is one suffering the same kind of fragmentation that it has identified elsewhere in "its" poem. The last section of part III, when the river is returned to again, enacts the same kind of fragmentation that Orpheus has suffered, but in this instance it is women who are the objects rather than the agents of dismemberment: "My feet are at Moorgate, and my heart / Under my feet." (l.296). Likewise, what we know already of Sweeney from the poems of 1920 suggests that his meeting with Mrs. Porter (ll.196-202) may not simply conform to the pattern of the male torn apart by the female suggested by the echo of Day's lines about Acteon and Diana; rather, perhaps, the opposite. The tone of the last section of part III is sad and moving; it is hard to tell whether the poet is expressing sympathy, or empathy, towards the women by presenting them as victims rather than villains, or to extract a kind of poetic revenge on Orpheus's behalf. This ambiguity will be central to consideration of the typist scene, to which I now turn.

5.25. The centre of the poem: the typist scene.

For the purpose of a detailed examination, I quote the scene in its entirety:

At the violet hour, when the eyes and back
Turn upward from the desk, when the human engine waits
Like a taxi throbbing waiting,
I Tiresias, though blind, throbbing between two lives,
Old man with wrinkled female breasts, can see

⁸¹Book XI, ll.45-55, *Ovid: Metamorphoses*, transl. Frank Justus Miller, Vol. II (London: Heinemann 1951).

At the violet hour, the evening hour that strives
 Homeward, and brings the sailor home from sea,
 The typist home at teatime, clears her breakfast, lights
 Her stove, and lays out food in tins.
 Out of the window perilously spread
 Her drying combinations touched by the sun's last rays,
 On the divan are piled (at night her bed)
 Stockings, slippers, camisoles, and stays.
 I Tiresias, old man with wrinkled female dug
 Perceived the scene, and foretold the rest -
 I too awaited the expected guest.
 He, the young man carbuncular, arrives,
 A small house agent's clerk, with one bold stare,
 One of the low on whom assurance sits
 As a silk hat on a Bradford millionaire.
 The time is now propitious, as he guesses,
 The meal is ended, she is bored and tired,
 Endeavours to engage her in caresses
 Which still are unreproved, if undesired.
 Flushed and decided, he assaults at once;
 Exploring hands encounter no defence;
 His vanity requires no response,
 And makes a welcome of indifference.
 (And I Tiresias have foresuffered all
 Enacted on this same divan or bed;
 I who have sat at Thebes below the wall
 And walked among the lowest of the dead.)
 Bestows one final patronising kiss,
 And gropes his way, finding the stairs unlit . . .

She turns and looks a moment in the glass,
 Hardly aware of her departed lover;
 Her brain allows one half-formed thought to pass:
 'Well now that's done: and I'm glad it's over.'
 When lovely woman stoops to folly and
 Paces about her room again, alone,
 She smooths her hair with automatic hand,
 And puts a record on the gramophone. (ll.215-56)

The scene is regarded by many as the greatest poetry of the whole poem; Hugh Kenner calls it "the great tour de force of the poem" identifying in its action "the mutual compliance of a ritual scene", and praising the rhymes that "come with a weary inevitability that parodies the formal elegance of Gray" (Kenner, pp.142-45). Allen Tate calls it "a masterpiece, perhaps the most profound vision that we have of modern man", and agrees with Kenner that "there is no despair in the scene itself", similarly viewing the action as a kind of de-valued ritual: "the clerk stands for the

secularization of the religious and qualitative values in the modern world”⁸². Burton Raffel strikes a cautionary note: “The long seduction scene is extremely well done. It needs, I would argue, none of the sometimes incredible explication given to this poem by some critics”⁸³. I hope to give a credible explication.

This is the section of the poem where James E. Miller’s thesis of a “Verdenalocentric” *Waste Land* seems to me slightly unsound, describing “The Fire Sermon” as possessing throughout “the passion of a misogynist, burning with a hatred that seems almost inexplicable” unless one reads the poem as an elegy for Verdenal (Miller, p.86). Although I would agree that a strongly misogynistic tone can be found in much of the poem, some of it well hidden and not usually noticed⁸⁴, I find “The Fire Sermon” to be the least misogynistic part; on the contrary, I think the female characters here are portrayed very sympathetically for the most part. Miller in any case contradicts his statement when he correctly speculates: “It is perhaps of some significance that Tiresias, although presented as a bisexual witness, seems to identify with the typist as she awaits her lover”(Miller, p.99). Indeed, I will argue for a reading of the scene as concerning the repeated reversal and combination of gender, via literary myth.

5.26. The scene’s two false starts.

It is worth noting that the original drafts of “The Fire Sermon” had a kind of equivalent scene to this, but written in heroic couplets in the manner of Pope, and describing one Fresca, reminiscent of Pope’s own Belinda from *The Rape of the Lock* (*TWLfacts*, pp.23-29). There is still an echo of that poem in the sun’s last rays touching the typist’s combinations, as the noonday sun peeps through the curtains of Belinda’s room⁸⁵. More importantly, as with Volupine before, Eliot describes Fresca, satirically, as “a Venus Anadyomene” newly stepped into society. Another sea-changed character - she sprang from the testicles of Uranus, castrated by his own son

⁸²“T. S. Eliot”, *Reactionary Essays* (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1936, p.31) (excerpt) in *A Collection of Critical Essays on The Waste Land*, ed. Jay Martin (New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, 1968), pp.31-32 (p.32).

⁸³ *T. S. Eliot* (New York: Continuum), 1991.

⁸⁴As in the derivative context of the allusion in ll.406-09. See section 5.21.

⁸⁵ “Sol, through white curtains shot a tim’rous ray / And oped those eyes that must eclipse the day” (ll.13-14); *Poems*, selected by Douglas Grant (London: Penguin, 1985), p.41.

Cronos and hurled into the sea - she is to be symbolically present even more fully in the final version of part III. I think also, the Popeian air is one Eliot wished to retain for a passage whose real progenitor he did not want easily recognised.

The other false start is a technical one, delineated here by the repetition of "At the violet hour"; it is with this second instance that the scene truly opens in terms of the underlying myth, and again I think the first start is to prevent the immediate recognition by burying, in visual terms on the page, the real start. Additionally, the repetition of violet should call to mind the flower that grew from the blood of the castrated Attis, as well as insinuating a homophone for "the violate hour", the hour of rape.

5.27. "Home from the hill": the arrival of the mythic protagonists.

Sappho is echoed in lines 220-21, as Eliot writes in his notes: "This may not appear as exact as Sappho's lines, but I had in mind the 'longshore' or 'dory' fisherman, who returns at nightfall" (*ECP*, p.83); what he says he had in mind and what is evident in the poem itself are not necessarily the same thing. His "evening hour" is an alteration of Sappho's "Hesperus", otherwise known as the "Evening Star", which guides sailors safely home, and brings children to their mothers' arms⁸⁶. But as I have mentioned in my comparison of "A Game of Chess" and "Lamia" (section 5.18), 'Evening star' is also the title by which the planet Venus is known, only the moon being a brighter object in the night sky; and Venus, in her Anadyomene incarnation, was also a sea goddess and protector of sailors.

What should be obvious in Eliot's reference to the sailor home from sea is its mimicry, not so much of Sappho, but of Stevenson's *Requiem*, and the line "Home is the sailor, home from sea,"⁸⁷. This is usually noted by critics, but it never seems to occur to them to recall the line that follows, which should immediately declare itself in the mind and on the tongue of anyone who has read the poem: "And the hunter, home from the hill". Regardless of the significance of this line, which I will discuss,

⁸⁶Fragment 104 (120. 133) in *Sappho et Alceus: Fragmenta*, ed. Eva-Maria Voigt (Amsterdam: Athenaeum and Polak & Van Gennep, 1971), p.117.

⁸⁷ "This be the verse you grave for me, / Here he lies where he longed to be, / Home is the sailor, home from the sea, / And the hunter, home from the hill"; "Requiem", ll.5-8, in *Poems: Including Underwoods, Ballads, Songs of Travel* (London: Chatto And Windus, 1917), p.31.

this seems to be the prime example of Eliot's employment of the versicle-and-response technique I proposed earlier. Stevenson has always been a popular poet, and *Requiem* is an extremely famous poem; the response of someone reasonably fond of poetry, at least in Eliot's day, should have been Pavlovian, and it gives the lie to the notion that Eliot's allusions to other literature necessarily make his work "obscure" - there comes a point when the poet can no longer be accused of being difficult, and the reader - again, at least when Eliot wrote - must start being accused of laziness. This is a key allusion and it is given straightforwardly.

Although we should recognise the literary ghost of Stevenson's hunter, the counterpart to the sailor that Eliot actually gives is "The typist home at teatime". The reason for this will be made clear, but if we remain for the moment with the hunting theme, then the appearance only about twenty lines earlier of Acteon and Diana, in the form of Sweeney and Mrs. Porter, can be seen as a clue prefiguring the treatment of a hunting theme. Interestingly, Grover Smith notes that "Having alluded already to Acteon and Diana, Eliot did not follow the alternative myth, used by Tennyson in his "Tiresias," that the prophet was blinded because he saw Pallas Athene naked in her bath, but he apparently drew on Swinburne's "Tiresias" for the phrase "I Tiresias"" (Smith, p.88). I think Eliot *was* drawing on an alternative myth, but that it was not directly related to Tiresias, rather it concerned another male mortal and another goddess, and again involved hunting; the figure of Tiresias as having been both male and female supplies the clue as to the characterisation *technique* that Eliot will use, more so than the underlying myth. I have already made it clear that I have the goddess Venus in mind with relation to this, and there is another clue in this respect in Eliot's rendition, in his Notes, of the quotation from Ovid about Tiresias. In the line "venus huic erat utraque nota", Eliot gives "venus" uncapitalized, whereas other editions often, indeed usually, capitalize, as "Venus". This may appear a pedantic point, as of course the meaning with either spelling is the same: "He knew both sides of love", rather than "he knew both sides of Venus (planet/person)". But what the original capitalised version acknowledges is the duality of "Venus" as both a symbol, a word for "love", and a deity, that is she is both signifier and signified, rather as I have written with regard to the book and the body, the "corpus" of literature. We

have, additionally, already noticed a possible reference to Venus as the planet, and, indeed, come across the symbolic figure of Venus with reference to the relation of “A Game of Chess” to “Lamia” and “Hero and Leander”.

If, as I have proposed, Eliot is drawing on a particular myth relating to Venus in the typist passage, and if he is basing it on another literary account of that myth, then the clues given prior to the typist’s arrival might lead us to expect the following: that the appearance of Tiresias suggests a theme or technique of gender reversal or combination; that the story will involve hunting, and probably, with regard to Acteon and Diana, a hunting fatality; and that the writer Eliot is referring to is at least as important a poet, if not more so, than Pope; one might also add that it should be preferably related to the theme of the dead and resurrected god. The only answer that could meet all these requirements is that the writer is Shakespeare, and that the work in question is his long poem, “Venus and Adonis”.

5.28. “Venus and Adonis” as “noble god-father” to *The Waste Land*.

I shall offer the allusions to Shakespeare’s poem that are to be found in Eliot’s text in due course, but first it may be of use briefly to give some background information regarding “Venus and Adonis”, and why Eliot might have thought to utilise it for his own purposes. The poem is Shakespeare’s first published work (in the summer of 1593), though probably not the first of the early pieces that he wrote, and describes, in just under 1200 lines the seduction of Adonis by Venus, his subsequent death at the tusks of a boar, and Venus’s grief; henceforth, she vows, love (characterised as male) will be attended by sorrow and jealousy, unpredictable and chaotic, the source of unexpected joy, but also of misery and wars (“Venus and Adonis”, ll.1135-64).

“Venus and Adonis” is Shakespeare’s most neglected work. There is, as far as I am aware, not one book devoted it, unlike, for instance, the shorter, and scarcely better known, *Passionate Pilgrim*, and it is hardly ever discussed, if mentioned, in general works on Shakespeare. There has, at least, been a revival - or birth - of interest recently, as evidenced in articles by Catherine Belsey, K Duncan-Jones, and

A. D. Cousins⁸⁸. The very obscurity of the work, however, would be attractive to Eliot, who advocated that the mature poet should borrow from works that were distant, either in terms of being old, or not well known, or in another language. Eliot had already borrowed from the little-known Elizabethan poet, John Day, and his *Parliament of Bees*, for his evocation of a modern-day Diana and Acteon⁸⁹, so the opportunity of adapting the complementary myth of Venus and Adonis from another obscure Elizabethan work, and one that just happened in this case to be by Shakespeare, would have seemed a godsend; even the imagery of Shakespeare's dedication to the Earl of Southampton would have offered a perfect parallel for the title and themes of Eliot's poem: "... if the first heire of my invention prove deformed, I shall be sorie it had so noble a god-father: *and never after eare so barren a land*, for feare it yield me still so bad a harvest." (my italics).

What is particularly significant is the way in which Shakespeare adapted the Venus and Adonis myth for his own purposes, in a manner that prefigures Eliot's own concerns and technique in *The Waste Land*. Shakespeare's own literary sources are ones which Eliot made free use of in *his* poem, namely Marlowe's "Hero and Leander" and Ovid's *Metamorphoses*. As was mentioned above, there is evidence of allusive cross-fertilisation in the case of "Hero and Leander". As for Ovid, Edgar Fripp remarks "[Shakespeare] knew his metamorphoses. He blends the story of Venus and Adonis (in Bk. X) with that of Salmacis and Hermaphroditus (in Bk. IV), making Adonis emphatically a boy, and heightening, for contrast, the harlot features of the goddess." Fripp also detects the influence of Ovid's rendering of Echo and Narcissus⁹⁰. Shakespeare depicts an Adonis who has no interest in love, preferring hunting and resistant to Venus' approaches, to the extent that her "seduction" of him amounts almost to a rape. Venus rather dominates the poem to the exclusion of

⁸⁸Belsey, "Love As *Trompe L'Oeil*: Taxonomies of Desire in "Venus and Adonis"", *Shakespeare Quarterly*, 46: 3 (1995), 257-76; Duncan-Jones, "Much Ado with Red and White - the Earliest Reader's of William Shakespeare's 'Venus and Adonis'", *Review of English Studies*, 44: 176 (1993), 479-501; Cousins, "Venus Reconsidered - The Goddess of Love in 'Venus and Adonis'", *Studia Neophilologica*, 66: 2 (1994), 197-207; Also, T. F. Baumlin, "The Birth of the Bard - 'Venus and Adonis' and Poetic Apotheosis", *Papers on Language and Literature*, 26: 2 (1990), 191-211.

⁸⁹ *The Parliament of Bees: A Critical edition*, ed. William T. Cocke, III (New York and London: Garland, 1979), pp.22-23; *ECP*, pp.70,82.

⁹⁰Edgar I. Fripp, *Shakespeare: Man and Artist* (2 vols), Vol I (London: Oxford University Press, 1938), p.336.

everyone else - as Fripp judiciously remarks, "We have had enough of Venus at the close, and too little of Adonis" (Fripp, p.337). There is no indication of an assault borne of such disinclination on Adonis' part in Ovid's original. As for the Salmacis hybridisation, Shakespeare draws freely on the red-and-white imagery of Ovid's original, and also takes the example of the female as sexually predatorial, the male as resistant but weak and emasculated. The struggle between Venus and Adonis matches closely Eliot's gender concerns throughout *The Waste Land*: Adonis avoids love because "I have heard it is a life in death" ("Venus and Adonis", ll.413); She characterises him as both reticent and siren-like, a kind of combination of the couple in "A Game of Chess" - "'What! Canst thou talk?' quoth she 'Hast thou a tongue? / O would thou hadst not, or I had no hearing! / Thy mermaid's voice hath done me double wrong;'" (ll.426-28); and his resistance provokes her both to question his masculinity, "'Thou art no man, though of a man's complexion, / For men will kiss even by their own direction.'" (ll.215-16), and to wish that their genders were reversed, "'Would thou wert as I am, and I a man,'" (l.369) in order to normalise her "male" assertiveness, and his "female" coyness.

5.29. Gender inversion of the mythic protagonists.

So Shakespeare's own radical treatment of the myth has basic thematic parallels with Eliot's whole poem. But it is particularly in the typist passage, with its description of a similar sexual assault, that the actual literary echoes are strongest, subject, however, to Eliot's own subversion of Shakespeare's original subversion. For to read the scene as a re-enactment of the Venus and Adonis story, one must note that Eliot has reversed the genders of the mythic protagonists, so that it is now the typist who represents Adonis (hence "the typist home at teatime" and "the hunter home from the hill" as incarnation and ghost respectively in line 222) and the repugnant young man carbuncular who symbolises Venus.

The opening of the scene, with either instance of "the violet hour", matches the very start of Shakespeare's poem "Even as the sun with purple-colour'd face / Had ta'en his last leave of the weeping morn, / Rose cheek'd Adonis hied him to the chase; / Hunting he loved, but love he laughed to scorn." (ll.1-4). Just as the young

man has “one bold stare”, Venus “like a bold-fac’d suitor gins to woo [Adonis]”(l.6) The twin descriptions of the assault contain the same mixture of heated lust and cold forbearance on the part of the protagonists: Eliot’s

The meal is ended, she is bored and tired,
Endeavors to engage her in caresses
Which still are unreproved, if undesired.
Flushed and decided, he assaults at once;
Exploring hands encounter no defence;
His vanity requires no response,
And makes a welcome of indifference.

echoes “[Adonis] blushed and pouted in a dull disdain, / With leaden appetite, unapt to toy; / She red and hot as coals of glowing fire, / He red for shame, but frosty in desire,” to give but one example of their unshared feelings (she keeps him pinned down for about 400 lines). And Eliot seems to split apart the Shakespeare couplet “He saith she is immodest, blames her miss, / What follows more, she murders with a kiss”(“Venus and Adonis”, ll.53-54) to form his own “His vanity requires no response ...” and “Bestows one final patronising kiss”. Against the fair objection that Eliot may have borrowed the kiss from Wilde’s “for each man kills the thing he loves, / [...] / the coward with a kiss”⁹¹, and that *that* derives from Judas’ betrayal of Christ in the New Testament, one could argue that it is equally likely that Shakespeare, too, derived his kiss from Judas’, and that Wilde, himself another notorious “borrower”, could also have taken it from “Venus and Adonis”.

As for the imagery of red and white, derived initially by Shakespeare from Ovid’s Salmacis and Hermaphroditus, one might note that Eliot’s description of a London church that comes shortly after the typist scene, namely St. Magnus Martyr with its Ionian white and gold (ll.263-265), originally referred to “Michael Paternoster Royal, red and white” (*TWLfacts*, p.35).

Finally, the symbolism of Shakespeare’s poem may cast some light on Eliot’s description “Out of the window perilously spread/ Her drying combinations touched by the sun’s last rays, / On the divan are piled (at night her bed) / Stockings, slippers, camisoles, and stays”. Critics have generally read here an allusion to Keats’

⁹¹“The Ballad of Reading Gaol”, in *The Complete Works of Oscar Wilde* (London and Glasgow: Collins, 1966), pp.843-60 (p.844).

“Charmed magic casements, opening on the foam / Of perilous seas, in faery lands forlorn”, and A. Walton Litz uses this example to open an interesting essay on the very subject of Eliot’s allusions and to what extent they may be real or imagined⁹². Maud Ellmann, meanwhile, suggests that the convertible divan and underwear spread out of the window demonstrate a blurring of notions of public and private space (Ellmann, p.98). I think both these points are valid, but the main literary derivation, as I see it, extends Eliot’s purpose still further; the lines I have in mind are spoken by Venus, boasting how she “disarmed” Mars, the god of war, and rendered him “my captive and my slave”:

‘Over my altars hath he hung his lance,
His batt’red shield, his uncontrolled crest,
And for my sake hath learn’d to sport and dance,
To toy, to wanton, dally, smile, and jest,
Scorning his churlish drum and ensign red,
Making my arms his field, his tent my bed’. (“Venus and Adonis”, ll.103-08)

I think the echoes are unmistakable, even down to the metrical similarity⁹³, and the prototype should lend itself perfectly well to the Eliot’s themes of war and emasculation. And yet what is left once Eliot has transposed it into his idiom is merely the “armour” of the typist, supposedly designed to enhance her physical allure, but at the same time physically restrictive (“stays”); her changeable divan marks out, for the most part, her comparative poverty. So that although in this instance the typist is symbolically identified with the seductive Venus rather than Adonis, it is in a half-hearted manner; she is in no sense predatorial - even her playing of music *after* the main events of the scene, when it should really precede a seduction, testifies to her artlessness. It is notable that the young man replaces her as representative of

⁹²A. Walton Litz, “The Allusive Poet: Eliot and His Sources”, in *T. S. Eliot: The Modernist in History*, ed. Ronald Bush (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), pp.137-51.

⁹³William M. Gibson interestingly speculated that Eliot had “embedded a double Shakespearean sonnet” in this passage and argues that the meaning of the passage “is measurably enhanced when the rhythms and rhymes of the Shakespearean sonnet echo in the mind. [...] The sonnet configuration creates, I suggest, certain expectations in the reader: an exalted view of love, a harmony of chiming quatrains, a fine turn of thought and feeling in the couplet. Mr. Eliot here disappoints and transmutes such expectations.” In “Sonnets in T. S. Eliot’s *The Waste Land*,” *American Literature*, 32 (1961), 465-66, reprinted in Martin, pp.32-33. As I have argued, I think the passage is based on “Venus and Adonis”, and I think this applies also with regard to the metrics, as a reading of a brief sample of it should confirm, but this long poem and the sonnets are in any case metrically quite similar, so the influence in that respect could have been dual.

Shakespeare's Venus when he arrives - she switching to Adonis, as discussed - and that when he leaves she is again characterised as Venus, though significantly in echoes of a more sympathetic portrayal of her than elsewhere in Shakespeare's poem; the numbness and confusion of the typist after the assault, pacing about her room with a half-formed thought in her brain, matches that of Venus when she sees the boar that she imagines, rightly, has killed Adonis: "Her more than haste is mated with delays, / Like the proceedings of a drunken brain" ("Venus and Adonis", ll.909-10). More poignantly, the typist's putting of the record on the gramophone, the music emanating from the horn and merging into "This music crept by me on the water", parallels Venus' hearing what will effectively turn out to be a dirge, when she thinks she hears Adonis' horn: "Even at this word she hears a merry horn, / Whereat she leaps that was but late forlorn"; she is mistaken, and like the 'lovely woman', Eliot's typist, She has discovered "too late" the imperfections of human love.

5.30. Tiresias, Apollonius, and a vision of marriage.

At this point I feel we could draw some conclusions as to the further significance of Tiresias in "The Fire Sermon". Eliot's assertion in his Notes that "What Tiresias sees, in fact, is the substance of the poem" (*ECP*, p.82.) proved, as we have seen, a highly controversial one, with Grover Smith arousing much ire for his deduction that Tiresias was the speaker of the entire poem. I have stated my agreement with the view that Smith was mistaken, the mistake deriving, I think, from a simple semantic misreading of what Eliot wrote. Smith takes it to mean that Tiresias witnesses not just the typist scene, but additionally all the rest of the poem's action; but one could equally, and perhaps more obviously, understand Eliot as saying this: that although Tiresias only appears in *The Waste Land* during the typist scene, the one scene that he witnesses constitutes the central action of the whole poem and symbolically encompasses the rest of it. The rest of the poem, before and after this, may be viewed as *ritualistically* related to the central myth of the Venus and Adonis story, in both the anthropological and the literary senses; hence, for example, the buried vegetation god in Part I, the suggestions via allusion, particularly in Part II, that this is all taking place during the feast of Adonis, the relation of Phlebas to the

marine passage of Osiris or Adonis effigies in Part IV, and the journey towards the site of an Adonis/Easter ritual, the Arthurian chapel in Part V. These are all secondary or tertiary layers of *ritualism* around Part III's version of the actual original *myth*. Of course, in another sense *that too* is a kind of literary re-enactment of Shakespeare's own literary re-enactment. But it is nevertheless the centre of the poem, made more profound and moving by the fact that, in contrast with the overt consciousness of religious or anthropological ritual elsewhere in the poem, the typist and the young man are not aware of being part of any ritual, let alone of being at its core; they are simply leading their own (unhappy) lives.

If what Tiresias sees is the core of the poem, what then, is his own significance? I have already mentioned that he might alert us to the technique of gender reversal employed in Eliot's re-working of "Venus and Adonis". He is also a useful formal device as a kind of chorus for the mime show of the two young lovers, giving the narrative a detached tone that can combine simultaneously disdain and tragic awe at the significance of what is taking place; it is a mistake, I believe, to view the formal elegance of the verse here as merely mocking in its grandeur. Finally, he may be understood as another link with "A Game of Chess" in the sense that his speech contains further echoes of "Lamia".

The echoes refer us to the figure of Apollonius and his arrival at the wedding banquet. Three lines apart, we read both that he has solved a knotty problem, "'twas just as he foresaw", and that he describes himself as an "uninvited guest" ("Lamia" II. ll.162,165). Compare this with Eliot's lines "I Tiresias, old man with wrinkled dugs / Perceived the scene, and foretold the rest — / I too awaited the expected guest." Both Tiresias and Apollonius are wise old men witnessing the doomed, as it seems to them, dalliances of misguided youngsters, and both have a tendency to involve themselves in Juno's snake-metamorphosis fiascos, with unfortunate consequences. Although Tiresias presents himself as witnessing the arrival of the "expected guest", the young man carbuncular, he is himself, in a lesser and slightly comical sense, an "uninvited guest" like Apollonius. But perhaps more importantly, a correlation of Tiresias and Apollonius may help to account for the allusions to Spenser's *Prothalamion* in the opening of this part of the poem. Just as the enclosed-room scene in "Lamia" leads to

a wedding banquet, so “A Game of Chess” leads to something similar in “The Fire Sermon”. David Ward explains that “In pagan religion [as well as in the Christian religion], as Frazer, Cornford, Murray, and other contemporary anthropologists pointed out, the wedding, a wedding which is in some way or other the burial of the dead, is the master-metaphor for a central experience of the religious sensibility”⁹⁴. The metaphorical linking of Marriage and death in the poem, then, is dually one of modern irony and of ancient ritual.

5.31. The “Grail” attained - and relinquished.

To resume my main argument concerning the depiction of the typist as a grieving Venus: having availed himself, in Shakespeare’s poem, of an ideal literary prototype (or archetype) of the aggressive and meretricious woman, characteristic of much of his early poetry, Eliot seems to back down from following through with its full use here. If a feeling of hatred towards women, perhaps concerning the war (as in the white feathers of Gerontion), and of grief for his friend Verdenal, if these *did* play a large part in the genesis and development of *The Waste Land*, they seem to have been gradually replaced as central concerns, by the time the poem finishes, by issues of language and literature. “The Fire Sermon” contains the core of poem. Once Eliot had located, or installed, the corpus of literature in the poem, the work simultaneously attains a power beyond most other poetry, *and* loses the inclination to exercise it. I believe that quite largely Eliot’s final purpose with *The Waste Land* - as I have said, I do not imagine it was his initial one - was to attain a mastery of literature, in the same way that the purpose of the quester, if Weston was correct, was to gain access to mystic secrets, and that this is why he employs the Notes as half-boast, half-false trail.

With regard to the encryption of “Venus and Adonis” in his poem, this may have been intended either as a ritual re-enactment of the literary myth or as a private joke for his own benefit only, a joke that manages both to undermine and to exalt the least-read work of the central figure in English literature. It would be difficult for critics to write accurately about an Oedipal struggle in Eliot’s poetry, because it would be difficult to identify which “body” had gone missing. But as “Venus and

⁹⁴T. S. Eliot: *Between Two Worlds: A Reading of T. S. Eliot’s Poetry and Plays* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1973), p.83.

Adonis” took its place at the centre of the text, the conclusions that one would draw from it as a whole could only undermine the themes of the overbearing and emasculating Venus that may have first attracted Eliot. For as Shakespeare’s poem makes clear, it was not Venus who was responsible for Adonis’ death, but his enthusiasm for hunting, and the ferocity of the boar (who in some accounts is Mars). Eliot’s parallel employment of Diana and Venus has intended to stigmatise the latter with the behaviour of the former; but it is chaste Diana, who revels in the hunt, not Venus. There is, then, a strain between the poem’s possible urge towards being an elegy for the dead soldier, and the sacrifice and self-sacrifice towards which it also strives, with regard to the myths that underlie the poem and the symbolic conquest of literature and language that is being attempted.

As I mentioned above, critics have seen in the typist scene the characteristics of ritual, and, as I have noted, Eliot’s employment of Shakespeare here can be read as a ritual enactment both of another work of literature and of the Venus and Adonis myth itself, prefigured in his text by re-enactments of other works whose own settings revolve around the time of the feast of Adonis. This may be partly Eliot amusing himself, and with perhaps his most skilful (certainly the most sustained) piece of literary ventriloquism. But the scene, indeed the whole of “The Fire Sermon” is also suffused with a sadness at the endless repetition of human failures, and this may have been the point where the amusement of such literary mimicry of life began to pall. Certainly, in very few of his works after *The Waste Land* does Eliot employ allusions in anything like the same amount as here. And when allusions *are* subsequently employed, they tend to come increasingly from a particular type of literature, and in a particular manner; indeed this trend may be detectable as really starting in the parts of *The Waste Land* subsequent to “The Fire Sermon”, “Death by Water” and “What the Thunder Said”, which I would like now to discuss briefly in drawing this chapter to a close.

VI

5.32. The problem with ritual.

Eliot's use of the vegetation myths and literature of the past to identify the present's experience as being in common with that of the past was fairly clearly a device of ordering history, to invest "the rending pain of re-enactment" with the meaning associated with ritual. In artistic terms, this was highly successful; as Brooker and Bentley put it, "It makes the modern world possible for art by enabling it to be seen or perceived from an ideal or imagined position similar in some ways to a fourth dimension" (Brooker and Bentley, p.52). But external to artistic considerations, there is the problem of what individual rituals signify, and whether they may signify truth; In an early seminar paper given by Eliot on the subject of rituals he is sanguine about the interpretation of them:

*no interpretation of a rite could explain its origin. For the meaning of the series of acts is to the performers themselves an interpretation; the same ritual remaining practically unchanged may assume different meanings for different generations of performers; and the rite may even have originated before "meaning" meant anything at all.*⁹⁵

The problem later was that the "meaning" of language and action had to and did mean a great deal to Eliot as a poet, and particularly with regard to his allusive technique. In *The Waste Land* he turns language in on itself to its most artificial form, that of a literature of literature. There is a kind of madness in such a heightened consciousness of language, as post-structuralist thought has both investigated and displayed; and whilst this may function well up to a point within the mind of the poet or critic, it cannot long function safely in the mind of the human being. Eliot did not believe in the objective truth of the myths and rituals he found in Frazer and Weston, though he found them artistically useful and approved of some of the principles behind them; nor, after he had constructed most of his allusive web in the poem, could he probably see much truth in the language of literature, except in relation to itself. A kind of short-circuiting of language-meaning was imminent, until in the final part of the poem Eliot seems to be using allusions in a more sober manner; no longer

⁹⁵ Hayward collection, King's College Library, University of Cambridge, quoted by Brooker and Bentley, p.50.

attempting to recreate the Grail or vegetation myths by the ritual re-shaping and re-stating of literature; rather referring to Christian and Bhuddist religious texts and myths, in a language that seems less concerned to play at quotation-hide-and-seek than the earlier parts of the poem, though still dense by normal standards. Of course, the ritual element occupies a front-of-stage position in all of Eliot's poetry, and he is insistent that it can never be entirely absent from poetry, since "all art emulates the condition of ritual. That is what it comes from and to what it must always return for nourishment"⁹⁶; but for Eliot the concern becomes increasingly with the poetic ritualisation of *religious* ritual moreso than that of *literary* ritual. I would agree with the (admittedly easy in retrospect) view that the poem hints towards some kind of religious impulse, though as I have said, this is not really evident until after "The Fire Sermon", or perhaps at the very end of that section, "O lord thou pluckest me out (l.309), and although I think it unlikely that this was one of the primary conscious intentions at the outset of the poem being written.

5.33. "Death by Water" and the problem of fetishisation.

Phlebas the Phoenician, a fortnight dead,
Forgot the cry of gulls, and the deep sea swell
And the profit and the loss.

A current under sea
Picked his bones in whispers. As he rose and fell
He passed the stages of his age and youth
Entering the whirlpool.

Gentile or Jew
O you who turn the wheel and look to windward,
Consider Phlebas, who once was handsome and tall as you. (ll.312-21)

Grover Smith's short and elegant discussion of this part of the poem makes, like many other critics, the following salient points: that Phlebas may be related to the ancient Alexandrian rite of casting a papyrus effigy of the head of Adonis into the sea, to be carried by the sea to Byblos and triumphantly fished out by cult-followers seven days later, though, disturbingly, Phlebas' seven days have long elapsed; that if his death "hints also at the physical death beyond the death-in-life of the waste land, it

⁹⁶Eliot: "Marianne Moore," Dial 75, no.6 (December 1923), p.597, quoted by Bedient, p.122.

certainly offers no hope of immortality, or of an escape from the wheel, but rather a lapse into hell or the endlessly recurring avatars of suffering in the flesh”; and that he represents, as a Phoenician, both mercantilism and the means by which the Adonis cults and Grail mystery are supposed to have been spread. Smith summarises the passage as an admonition “to renounce the traffic in worldly things and the lusts of the flesh which sunder men from love” (Smith, pp.91-92).

Smith’s résumé seems to me pretty thorough, (if perhaps a little too much so in his thoughts on the tormented state of poor Phlebas’s soul), but I would like to offer some additional small suggestions, each of which may be related to the concept of fetishisation. Firstly, Phlebas’ profession as merchant, and the language of lines 316, 317 and 319 are reminiscent to me of Kipling’s pithily cynical poem “The Gods of the Copy Book Headings” (1919), and in particular its opening lines:

As I pass through my incarnations in every age and race,
I make my proper prostrations to the Gods of the Market Place.
Peering through reverent fingers I watch them flourish and fall,
And the Gods of the Copy Book Headings, I notice, outlast them all.

Already at this point, the objection may be raised that “Death by Water” is itself a translation of the ending of one of Eliot’s own poems in French, “Dans le Restaurant” (*ECP*, p.53), which was in, any case, written before Kipling’s (probably in 1917). That is true, but “Death by Water” is not an exact translation from the French poem; the French refers simply to “sa vie antérieure”, “his previous life”, rather than his “age and youth”, and the phrase “Gentile or Jew” is not to be found in the original. My guess is that Kipling’s phrase “age and race” suggested, metrically and thematically, the two new phrases, “Age and youth” and “Gentile or Jew”. That Eliot should have been alluding to this particular poem may not appear so wild a probability when one recalls that Eliot was to edit a selection of Kipling’s poetry in which this appeared as the penultimate poem⁹⁷; one cannot be sure that Eliot had read the poem by the time, a year or two after its publication, that he wrote “Death by Water”, but if he had, as seems fairly likely in view of his editorship of such a book,

⁹⁷ *A Choice of Kipling’s Verse*, selected with introduction by T. S. Eliot (London: Faber and Faber, 1941), pp.295-97.

then this almost certainly *is* an allusion to that poem, since he definitely alludes to it in his later poem *Coriolan* ⁹⁸.

If the allusion is accepted as a strong possibility, we may make some further observations concerning Kipling's poem. By the phrase "The Gods of the Copy Book Headings" Kipling is referring to those suspicious commonplace sayings such as "Better the devil you know" which are nevertheless, he argues, of provenly greater truth and usefulness than any amount of the fashionable and sinister wisdom of "modern" thought - in whatever age. Kipling is particularly insistent, as the lines I have quoted indicate, in his portrayal of capitalism as one of the chief culprits, embodying greed and stupidity. Both Kipling, here, and Eliot, in *Coriolan*, are opposing the short-term values of the unrestricted market place from a position that is essentially reactionary. It may be objected that both positions could be classified as "right wing" and are therefore indistinguishable, but one should not ignore the fundamental differences between the two positions in terms of temperament. One is essentially backward-looking and clinging - the other, forward-looking and grasping. Now, the case of Phlebas presents an awkward problem, in that he is symbolic of both of these contradictory positions, in his twin capacities as modern, "urban", devotee of Mammon, and as ancient, "rural", devotee of Adonis. Like the costermonger Pearly king I referred to above, his role as representative of the nature-god is tainted by the profit motive; yet, on the other hand, it is his role as sea-going merchant that enables the cult to be spread in the first place.

The declamation "Unreal City" which recurs repeatedly in *The Waste Land* may be read as not simply referring to London, but in some the instances, at least, to its mile-square Financial area, "the City". The ambiguity might be seen as nicely appropriate, in view of both Eliot's implied criticism of the modern city metaphorically, and in London's case literally, having at its heart the temple of

⁹⁸In his depiction of the contradictory and meddling commissions that, to his mind, put vested interests and bureaucracy before the real needs of state security, *Coriolan* notes acerbically "A commission is appointed / To confer with the Volscean commission / About *perpetual peace*: the fletchers and javelin makers and smiths / Have appointed a joint committee to protest against the reduction of orders (*Coriolan*, II: "Difficulties of a Statesman"; *ECP*, p.141-42, my italics). Cf. Kipling: "When the Cambrian Measures were forming, They promised perpetual peace. / They swore, if we gave them our weapons, that the wars of the tribes would cease. / But when we disarmed They sold us and delivered us bound to our foe, / and the Gods of the Copy Book Headings said: '*Stick to the devil you know.*'" (ll.17-20).

Mammon rather than the temple of God, and of his own personal circumstances of working on his poetry at night and for Lloyds Bank during the day. It is an ambiguity that Terry Eagleton has, in his re-evaluative essay "Capitalism, Modernism and Postmodernism" identified as the paradoxical problem at the heart of modernism. What he says is extremely pertinent to the case of *The Waste Land*, and I quote, accordingly, at some length:

High Modernism [...] was born at a stroke with mass commodity culture. This is a fact about its internal form, not simply about its external history. Modernism is among other things a strategy whereby the work of art resists commodification, holds out by the skin of its teeth against those social forces which would degrade it to an exchangeable object. To this extent, modernist works are in contradiction with their own material status, self-divided phenomena which deny in their discursive forms their own shabby economic reality. To fend off such reduction to commodity status, the modernist work brackets off the referent or real historical world, thickens its textures and deranges its forms to forestall instant consumability, and draws its own language protectively around it to become a mysteriously autotelic object, free of all contaminating truck with the real. Brooding self-reflexively on its own being, it distances itself through irony from the shame of being no more than a brute, self-identical thing. But the most devastating irony of all is that in doing this the modernist work escapes from one form of commodification only to fall prey to another. If it avoids the humiliation of becoming an abstract, serialized, instantly exchangeable thing, it does so only by virtue of reproducing that other side of the commodity which is fetishism. The autonomous, self-regarding, impenetrable modernist artefact, in all its isolated splendour, is the commodity as fetish resisting the commodity as exchange, its solution to reification part of that very problem.⁹⁹

In Eagleton's economic terms, then, *The Waste Land* could be viewed as a fetishistic object, as has been suggested with regard to the description of the room in "A Game of Chess", and indeed we may see that the applicability of the term may be extended towards its very subject matter, whether we take that to be the tradition of English literature, the culture of Europe, or the mysterious Adonis cults. In its microcosmic form, "Death by Water"'s account of the drowned figure of Phlebas may be viewed as of fetishistic significance in four separate, but interrelated ways. In a literary sense, this part, by far the shortest of the poem's five movements, sets itself apart from the other's by means of its separate - watery - topography, by its

⁹⁹"Capitalism, Modernism and Postmodernism", in *Modern Criticism and Theory: A Reader*, ed. David Lodge (London: Longman, 1988), pp. 385-98 (p.392).

impenetrable and indifferent lifelessness, and by its apparent unconnectedness, at least at first or second glance, with what might be identified as the poem's main narrative threads; it can barely be said to have its own narrative thread, and gives the appearance of a self-contained lyric poem within a larger self-contained poem. Secondly, in the basic anthropological sense of the word, we may identify Phlebas himself with the Adonis or Osiris fetishes put into the water by their devotees. Of course, ironically he is only a fetish by dint of being symbolically exchangeable for a "real" papyrus or wooden fetish, thereby having the worst of both of Eagleton's fetishistic worlds.

The next sense in which Phlebas is fetishistic is the Freudian psychoanalytic one. His name, after all, means "phallus", and his entry into the whirlpool may be taken as representing the enclosure and subsequent destruction of the male by the female "gulf" or "space" that is often to be found lurking in Eliot's poetry. We may recall the foreshadowings of Phlebas's fate at the hands of female sexuality in the sirens of "Rhapsody" and "Prufrock, and the dragon-lamia and Salmacis imagery of "A Game of Chess", and that water has been taken to symbolise emasculation. The "reality" in "Death by Water" appears to be simply that the sailor became shipwrecked by a whirlpool, not by the aforementioned female sexuality, but the symbolic "reality" of the piece comes across as far stronger and more pointed than that. What is important to remember here, especially in view of Eagleton's economic sense of fetishisation and Phlebas's dual role as fertility god fetish and merchant, is that the medieval mermaid/siren/lamia figure that Eliot has repeatedly utilised in the poem does not merely symbolise sexual danger: we recall from the previous chapter Meg Twycross's point that Venus is associated with "luxuria", which can mean either "lechery" or "luxury". Indeed, observes Twycross, and that mermaids are characterised as "strange horys, who win a man over with the sweetness of their blandishments, and then, having sucked him dry, throw him away. Their rapacity - for a man's money rather than for sex - was a favourite theme of medieval moralists" (Twycross, p.37). The transformation of the man's eyes into pearls, merely to end up in the siren's jewel cases, suggests that the "self-regarding, impenetrable modernist" male protagonist, like a "broken Coriolanus", becomes prey to destruction precisely

because of his protective self-fetishisation, whatever kind of self-fetishisation that may be.

5.34. “What the Thunder Said”.

One could say that the problem of some kind of fetishisation is bound to become a feature in a work so insistently symbolic as *The Waste Land*. Symbols become referents for other symbols and so on, with the result that it becomes increasingly difficult to gauge to what extent the narrative threads and voices of the poem are real or symbolic simply in relation to each other. This simultaneously results in, and derives from, the sense of paranoia and confusion to be found in the waste land’s inhabitants. Their memory of who they may have been is matched by tortured desires, since they are never capable of properly fulfilling, or indeed of escaping from, the symbolic roles in which the poem, via its relation to other literature, casts them. The poem itself has a comparable relationship with previous literary texts. In the final sections of his poem, Eliot appears to be struggling to pacify and simplify somewhat the problem of uncontrollable symbolism that has resulted from his allusive technique

Certainly, “Death by Water” contains the straightforward and didactic “Consider Phlebas...”, a tone simply not found hitherto in Eliot’s poetry, suggesting a new forthrightness, as well as a kind of quiet acceptance in “Gentile or Jew” that matches Tiresias’ “I have foresuffered all” which unites the sexes, in common suffering at least, in the typist scene. At the same time, the last part still articulates the old fears of emasculation and ghastly women (the Tennysonian creature who fiddles whisper music on the strings of her drawn out hair; see ll.377-84.) It is interesting that it is at the end of this last virtuoso lyric display by Eliot that he refers to “voices singing out of empty cisterns and exhausted wells”, where the wells may refer to the source of literary inspiration. Certainly the Grail quest reaches an apparently dead end in an empty chapel (ll.385-92), although I have argued that in a literary sense Eliot had successfully and secretly resurrected one or more dead corpa; one should also remember that the Chapel Perilous is usually found near the start of Grail romances, so that perhaps this ending is, in the true Eliot manner, a kind of beginning.

The problem of gender is left unresolved in the final part, but is rendered rather more ghostly than corporeal in the description of the mysterious third figure on the road:

Who is the third who always walks beside you?
 When I count, there are only you and I together
 But when I look ahead up the white road
 There is always another one walking beside you
 Gliding wrapt in a brown mantle, hooded
 I do not know whether a man or a woman
 - But who is that on the other side of you.? (ll.359-65)

Like the woman playing whisper music, there is a strongly hallucinatory quality here, and Eliot's note relates it to an account of an Antarctic expedition wherein "it was related that the party of explorers, at the extremity of their strength, had the constant delusion that there was *one more member* than could actually be counted" (*ECP*, p.85). He also mentions (*ECP*, p.84) that he is employing the theme of the journey to Emmaus, amongst others, in this part of the poem. James E. Miller interprets this passage's significance as follows:

Most telling, perhaps, is the line, "I do not know whether a man or a woman." The silent party in this unequal exchange surely knows, for we have just witnessed his anguish over the one incontrovertible fact - "He who was living is now dead." [l.328] The other who is always walking by his side is the enduring memory which will not die, a memory as intrusive in a marriage as a physical presence. (Miller, p.121)

Miller makes his point well, though it is worth considering the probable real source of these lines, once again deriving from *The Woman in White*, as correctly noted by Grover Smith (Smith, p.328n): the scene referred to is in Part II, Chapter 5, where Marian and Laura think they see a figure walking in a mist near a lake:

"Was it a man or a woman?" She asked, in a whisper, as we moved at last into the dark dampness of the outer air.
 "I am not certain."
 "Which do you think?"
 "It looked like a woman."
 "I was afraid it was a man in a long cloak."
 "It may be a man. In this dim light it is not possible to be certain." (*WIW*, p.227)

It later transpires that the figure was Anne Catherick, which is not to claim that Miller is wrong and that the figure is a woman, rather that the theme of madness may be what Eliot had in mind. The sexes may become indistinguishable here as the human body becomes intangible. Following on from Carol Christ's definition of the female as substantially present in the poem, whilst the male is a disembodied voice dislocated in time, it is as if either the female has followed the male voice into the realms of insubstantiality, or that the male is on the verge of refiguring itself - in the same space that the female occupies, however. Christ observes that increasingly, towards the end of the poem, Eliot projects gender characteristics onto the landscape, rather than locating them in relation to actual female character's and voices, pace, again, the woman fiddling upon her hair strings:

he evokes them through a sexual fantasy that represents the collapse of civilization as an engulfment within an exhausted and blackened vagina, suggested in the images of empty cisterns, exhausted wells, and bats "with baby faces" crawling head downward down a blackened wall." [...] the world itself rather than the characters within it locates its sexual malaise.
(Christ, p.34)

And whilst in one sense this seems to evoke again the feeling of strangeness, the gaze-provoking world of "Prufrock" or "Rhapsody" and the associated threat towards the male, Christ notes that the poet then achieves "sexual potency in purely symbolic terms" by simply introducing male images within this landscape:

At the moment when the cock crows, Eliot transfers the power of articulation to the landscape, as the thunder speaks, giving the power of articulation to the poet. When the poet interprets the commands of the thunder, he once again describes human situations, but he articulates them in abstract and ungendered terms, as if only a language free from the categories of gender allows him to imagine human fulfilment. (Christ, p.35)

Calvin Bedient is following a not entirely dissimilar line when he detects glimpses of the mystic Absolute craved by the poet and quester in the mysterious third figure in the road:

Just as the Absolute cannot admit distinctions, so this "third" could be either a man or a woman, or neither. Only the human part of the protagonist would even be curious about classifying it as to gender. Still, his uncertainty may reflect a genuine androgyny in the figure (or figment of a figure). (Bedient, p.178)

Bedient refers to Mircea Eliade's discussion of androgyny and its meaning in ancient myth; Eliade explains:

Androgyny is an archaic and universal formula for the expression of wholeness, the coexistence of the contraries, or *coincidentia oppositorum*. More than a state of sexual completeness and autarchy, androgyny symbolises the perfection of a primordial non-conditioned state.¹⁰⁰

Bedient concludes from this that "while Tiresias experienced the sexes as co-existent, the protagonist may here experience their fusion or ground, an original undifferentiation" (Bedient, p.178-79).

The articulation of the thunder mentioned by Carol Christ is of considerable significance with respect to the theme of the power of language, which I cited as Eliot's increasing pre-occupation towards the end of the poem, and it clearly relates, via its juxtaposition, to the babble of voices and languages that close the poem. As far as the thunder's speech is concerned, Eliot reduces each of the three words *Datta*, *Dayadhvam*, *Damyata*, to the primal *Da*, supposedly the first articulated human syllable, also half of the nonsense word that gave its name to the Dada movement. Pinion observes that Eliot changed the order of the Sanskrit (originally "Damyata, Datta, Dayadhvam") "to end with the most important of these three commands", i.e. *Damyata* - "control" (Pinion, p.135). Now, Eliot may have done this for the purpose of metrical fluency in the re-iterating line 432: "Datta, Dayadhvam, Damyata", but it is interesting that Pinion considers the last to be the most important command, especially since Eliot did not give its full meaning in his notes, that is "control *yourself*". In a sense, though, he has been fulfilling both aspects of this command by his sacrificing his own poetic voice for much of the poem in order to ventriloquize with the voices and power, of numerous other poets. "Damyata" serves as a kind of reminder to the poet not to let his mask (or masks) slip.

The other passage I mentioned, namely the collection of quotations at the end of the poem, could be seen as attempting a similar kind of ordering to that hinted at in the Sanskrit-derived section, if an interesting theory of D. C. Fowler is correct. Fowler

¹⁰⁰ *Myths, Dreams and Mysteries: The Encounter Between Contemporary Faiths and Archaic Reality*, transl. by Philip Mairet (London and Glasgow: Collins, 1968), p.176.

suggests that “the ‘fragment’ passage is best understood as a charm”, drawing on Old English charms as examples, particularly those that relate to the restoration of infertile land, and the use of Latin words within these charms. As he points out, “The potency of foreign or strange words in charms was considered to be great”¹⁰¹. In this respect we might say that both passages incline towards a belief in words as possessive of supernatural power, independent of literary and grammatical contexts.

I am not entirely sure, though, that the linguistic flurry that occurs in the poem’s last lines is necessarily to be viewed as a positive thing. “What the Thunder Said” has tended towards comparative simplification and a clearing of the head, and it seems to me that the poem is slowly but steadily groping towards the esoteric content which has hitherto been shrouded by the exoteric ritual. The babble of the last lines creates the feeling that the never-ending allusive chain has gone “mad again” and is starting itself off once more, long since beyond the control of the poet who originally let it loose in the limitless matrix of literature.

In this respect, the final line of the poem “Shantih shantih shantih” (Peace, peace, peace) is both profound and amusing in its command that the linguistic riot cease. In his subsequent poetry Eliot often characterises mystic experience as being a kind of “still point” - in this poem it is perhaps the “blank card” which Madam Sosostriis cannot read. Both the symbolic actualisation of such an attainment in *The Waste Land*, and the proper manner of representing it on the page, are, it becomes clear, finally and perfectly only to be achieved by stopping writing.

5.35. Conclusion.

I recapitulate the main points of my argument as follows: that Eliot attempts in *The Waste Land* a ritualization of myth via literary re-enactments; that in the first three parts of the poem this entails or involves the theme of gender reversal or reconfiguration via reference to works that are themselves largely concerned with these themes; that the Adonis ritual aspect of the poem, which is of course also related to Grail myth, is foreshadowed in the references to “Hero and Leander” and

¹⁰¹D. C. Fowler, “The Waste Land: Mr. Eliot’s ‘Fragments’”, *College English*, 14 (January 1953), 234-35, repr. in *A Collection of Critical Essays on The Waste Land*, ed. Jay Martin (New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, 1968), pp.34-36.

“Lamia”; that “A Game of Chess” is haunted by numerous other texts’ attempts to place and represent the female in literature, and that the artifice of such attempts to construct the woman becomes as much a concern of this part of the poem as the artifice of the woman in “constructing” herself at her dressing table; that in the third part the fragmentation and reconfiguration spreads to involve mainly the body and voice of the figure of the poet; the poet reaches the zenith of his manipulation and subversion of literature and gender, to the extent of encrypting “Venus and Adonis”, and its creator Shakespeare, as the principal literary “corpus” buried or located within the poem; but that this in itself, although undetected, threatens to unbalance the poem and the poet by its essential contradiction of the themes and purpose it has initially been employed to reinforce; that there arises also the problem of fetishisation, with regard to both its subject matter and the status of *The Waste Land* itself as a work of literature; and that thereafter Eliot attempts to resolve the problem of his allusive technique via an increasing nullification of the power of gender, and focuses instead on a new approach towards language and its associated meanings and potential. This hints towards a different, though related, handling of myth in Eliot’s subsequent poetry.

I am in no way disputing the notion that Eliot’s “rhythmical grouching” in *The Waste Land* may have sprung in the first place from personal considerations, and that these may well have involved in large part the problems of his first marriage or his grief over the death of Jean Verdenal; these seem perfectly probable culprits. What I have attempted to show, however, is that the poem we are finally left with grew out of, and to an extent away from, these possible initial concerns; and that the allusive method employed - again quite possibly, initially, both to moderate the more personal impulses behind the poem and to facilitate the treatment of myths, particularly, as we have seen, the Venus and Adonis myth, myths that also interested Eliot in a purely anthropological sense - that this method came increasingly to be the *raison d’être* of the poem, both solving some of the poet’s problems and, by the nature of its multiplicity, creating more of its own.

Conclusion

“The shadow in his mouth”

Maud Ellmann and other recent critics have rightly questioned Eliot's concept of “impersonal” poetry, but I am not sure that they are correct in viewing the techniques of impersonality - primarily allusion - simply as a screen for Eliot's personal emotions. It was stated at the beginning of this study that Eliot's employment of allusion in his early poetry was to be understood not as an affectation but as a compulsion. This is not to rule out conscious and very possibly elitist motivations for continuing this practice, but I can still only conclude that many of the poems, and especially *The Waste Land*, could be more accurately described, not just as the product of a mind arranging literary memory, but as that of a mind itself composed in the first place *from* literary memory. Such “impersonality”, of course, is not “the escape from emotion” that Eliot identified it as in “Tradition and the Individual Talent”, but rather a neurotic constitution of emotion. It may not have been greatly helpful for a poet to have as his family motto the injunction “Tace et Fac” - be silent and make. How does one speak poetry whilst being silent?

All this which brings us back to our unfinished business with “The Death of Saint Narcissus” in Chapter Four. I suggested that the poem demonstrates a peculiar uncertainty with regard to its own allusive method, its own literary incarnations, and that here as elsewhere the treatment of martyrdom seems especially problematic for Eliot. I also noted Ted Hughes's insistence that this is a key poem and that Narcissus is “the first portrait, perhaps the only full-face portrait, of Eliot's genius”. Finally, it is to be remembered that throughout the early work Eliot, it has been argued, genders the poetic idiom as feminine. Now, we recall that the first part of *The Waste Land* includes an invocation to “Come in under the shadow of this red rock” that may suggest a return to the site of Narcissus's martyrdom. Of course, Narcissus's body is not to be found under the red rock in *The Waste Land*, so where is he? The answer, in one sense, is: all around. The body of the poem may be understood constituted of re-incarnated literary bodies where Narcissus had been constituted of physical bodies. In this sense, *The Waste Land* achieves what Saint Narcissus had attempted. But the final

lines of the earlier poem had carried within them the seed of the mythic personality that is perhaps the true portrait - or at least the other side of the coin - of Eliot's genius:

Now he is green, dry and stained
With the shadow in his mouth.

What is a shadow in the mouth? In connection with Narcissus generally - as "Hero and Leander" and "Venus and Adonis" show - and indeed often elsewhere in poetry, "shadow" is just another term for *reflection*. But, "a reflection in the mouth"? This is a verbal reflection, not a visual one, and never capable of such perfectly blankly imitation as a mirror. The reflective theory of art - that art simply reflects reality - is the most ancient and powerful one in existence. But it is also false, for numerous reasons, not all of which can be discussed here. What should be noted though, is that the myth of Narcissus in fact marks a kind of "fall" of self-consciousness; it is a story about someone who mistakes a mirror for reality told, on the understanding that such a fusion is no longer possible. The reason that art can never simply mirror human nature is that humans never behave naturally when they see a mirror. The use of an identifiable allusive literary method which alters, distorts and re-embodies, then, is merely a more obvious acknowledgement of what art is always doing anyway. Art is really allusion, not illusion, though the sado-masochist impulse towards the latter state is vital in creating the reality of the former.

Narcissus, at the end, still carries the shadow in his mouth. It is, correct, it seems to me, to identify Eliot's strange martyr poem as his one full-face portrait. For alongside the character of Narcissus, the *Metamorphoses* myth contains another protagonist whom we tend to overlook, but whose name, uncapitalised, has been used again and again in this study, and who is the disembodied embodiment of Eliot's concerns with myth and gender. She is the true symbol of Eliot's early poetry, its true slave and master, one who has no words of her own and yet speaks. In Ovid's words,

that talkative nymph who cannot stay silent when another speaks, but yet has not learned to speak first herself. Her name is Echo, and she always answers back.¹

¹ *Metamorphoses*, transl. with an introduction by Mary M. Innes (London: Penguin, 1955), p.83.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Primary Sources

Alighieri, Dante, *The Divine Comedy* (3 vols), with transl. by John D. Sinclair (London and New York: Oxford University Press, 1939).

Anonymous, *Pervigilium Veneris*, ed. with transl. and commentary by Laurence Catlow (Brussels: Latomus Revue D'Études Latines, 1980).

Arnold, Matthew, *The Poems of Matthew Arnold*, ed. Kenneth Allott (London: Longman's, Green and Co., 1965).

Beddoes, Thomas Lovell, *The Works of Thomas Lovell Beddoes*, ed. with introduction by H. W. Donner (London: Oxford University Press, 1935).

Browning, Thomas, *Poems of Thomas Browning* (London and New York: Oxford University Press, 1912).

Chaucer, Geoffrey, *The Book of the Duchess*, ed. Helen Phillips (Durham: Durham and Saint Andrews Medieval Texts, 1982).

- *The Riverside Chaucer*, ed. Larry D. Benson and others (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988).

Collins, Wilkie, *The Woman in White* (London: Penguin, 1974).

Day, John, *The Parliament of Bees: A Critical Edition*, ed. William T. Cocke III (New York and London: Garland, 1979).

De Quincey, Thomas, *Confessions of an English Opium-Eater* (London: Penguin, 1997).

Dobson, Austin, *Austin Dobson: The Complete Poetical Works* (London: Humphrey Milford, 1923).

Dowson, Ernest, *The Poems of Ernest Dowson*, with a memoir by Arthur Symonds (London: Bodley Head, 1911).

Eliot, T. S., *Collected Poems 1909-1962* (London: Faber and Faber, 1974).

- *For Lancelot Andrewes: Essays in Style and Order*, rev. edn (London: Faber and Faber, 1970).

- *Inventions of the March Hare: Poems 1909-1917*, ed. Christopher Ricks (London: Faber and Faber, 1996).

- "London Letter", *Dial*, 71 (October 1923), 453.
- *The Letters of T. S. Eliot*, Vol.1: 1898-1922 (London: Faber and Faber, 1988).
- *Poems Written in Early Youth* (London, Faber and Faber, 1967).
- *The Sacred Wood*, 7th edn (London: Methuen, 1950).
- *Selected Essays*, 3rd edn (London: Faber and Faber, 1951).
- *Selected Prose*, ed. John Hayward (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1953).
- *To Criticise the Critic* (London: Faber and Faber, 1965).
- *The Use of Poetry and the Use of Criticism* (London: Faber and Faber, 1933).
- "Ulysses, Order, and Myth", *Dial*, 75: 5 (November 1923), 480-83.
- *The Waste Land: A Facsimile and Transcript of the Original Drafts*, ed. Valerie Eliot (London: Faber and Faber, 1971).

Ford, John, *'Tis Pity She's a Whore*, ed. Brian Morris (London: A&C Black, 1968).

Gautier, Theophile, *Émaux et Camées* (Paris: Jacques Madelaine, 1938).

Hawthorne, Nathaniel, *Hawthorne Centenary Edition* (12 vols), Vol VII: *Tales* (Ohio: Ohio University Press, 1972).

Hoffmann, E. T. A., *Tales of Hoffmann*, selected and transl. with introduction. by R. J. Hollingdale (London: Penguin, 1982).

James, Henry, *The Aspern Papers* (London: Penguin, 1994).

Jones, Peter, ed., *Imagist Poetry* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1972).

Keats, John, *Poetical Works*, ed. H. Buxton Forman (London: Oxford University Press, 1924).

Kipling, Rudyard, *A Choice of Kipling's Verse*, selected with introduction by T. S. Eliot (London: Faber and Faber, 1941).

- *Kipling's Verse: Definitive Edition* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1940).

Laforque, Jules, *Poems of Jules Laforque*, transl. by Peter Dale (London: Anvil, 1986).

Marlowe, Christopher, *Christopher Marlowe: The Poems*, ed. Millar Maclure (London: Methuen, 1968).

Milton, John, *Paradise Lost*, ed. Alistair Fowler (London: Longman, 1981).

Moore, George, *Memoirs of My Dead Life*, 3rd edn (London: Heineman: 1908).

Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, transl. by Mary Innes (London: Penguin, 1955).

- *Metamorphoses*, with transl. by Frank Justus Miller, Vol II (London: Heinemann, 1951).

Pater, Walter, *The Renaissance: Studies in Art and Poetry* (London: Macmillan, 1913).

Poe, Edgar Allan, *Selected Tales* (London: Penguin, 1994).

Pope, Alexander, *Poems*, selected by Douglas Grant (London: Penguin, 1985).

Pound, Ezra, *The Selected Letters of Ezra Pound 1907-1941*, ed. D. D. Paige (London: Faber and Faber, 1982).

- *Selected Poems*, rev. edn (London: Faber and Faber, 1948).

Rossetti, Christina, *A Choice of Christina Rossetti's Verse*, selected with introduction by Elizabeth Jennings (London: Faber and Faber, 1970).

Rossetti, Dante Gabriel, *Dante Gabriel Rossetti: An Anthology*, selected by F. L. Lucas (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1933).

Sacher-Masoch, Leopold Von, *Venus in Furs, and Selected Letters*, transl. by Uwe Moeller and Laura Lindgren (New York: Masquerade, 1993).

Sappho and Alcaeus, *Sappho et Alcaeus: Fragmenta*, ed. Eva-Maria Voigt (Amsterdam: Athenaeum and Polak & Van Gennep, 1971).

Shakespeare, William, *The Complete Works of William Shakespeare*, ed. J. W. Craig (London: Robinson, 1993).

Shelley, Percy Bysshe, *Complete Works of Percy Bysshe Shelley* (10 vols), Vol IV: *Poems* (London: Ernest Benn, 1965).

Sotheby's, *European Ceramics & Glass and Applied Arts* (auction catalogue), London, 15th March 1994.

Spenser, Edmund, *The Works of Edmund Spenser* (London: Edward Moxon, 1845).

Stevenson, Robert Louis, *A Child's Garden of Verses* (London and Glasgow: Blackie, 1975).

- *Poems: Including Underwoods, Ballads, Songs of Travel* (London: Chatto And Windus, 1917).

Swinburne, Algernon Charles, *Poems and Ballads* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1883).

Tennyson, Alfred Lord, *In Memoriam, Maud and Other Poems*, ed. John D. Jump (London: J. M. Dent and Sons, 1974).

Webster, John, *The Devil's Law-Case*, ed. Frances A. Shirley (Edward Arnold: London, 1972).

- *The Duchess of Malfi*, ed. Elizabeth Brennan, 3rd edn (London: A&C Black, 1993).
- *The White Devil*, ed. John Russell Brown (Welwyn Garden City: Broadwater Press, 1960).

Wilde, Oscar, *The Complete Works of Oscar Wilde* (London and Glasgow: Collins, 1966).

- *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, ed. Peter Ackroyd (London: Penguin, 1985).

Woolf, Virginia, *To the Lighthouse*, ed. Stella McNicholl (London: Penguin, 1992).

Wordsworth, William, *William Wordsworth* (The Oxford Authors), ed. Stephen Gill, Corrected edn (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986).

Yeats, Wiliam Butler, ed., *The Oxford Book of Modern Verse 1892-1935* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1935).

Secondary Sources

Abrams, M. H., *The Mirror and the Lamp: Romantic Theory and the Cultural Tradition* (London, Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1953).

Aiken, Conrad, "An Anatomy of Melancholy", in *A Collection of Critical Essays on The Waste Land*, ed. Jay Martin (New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, 1968), pp.52-58.

Bachtin, Nicholas, "English Poetry in Greek: Notes on a Comparable Study of Poetic Idioms", *Poetics Today*, 6 (1985), 333-56.

- Bagchee, Shyamal, ed., *T. S. Eliot Annual No.1* (Basingstoke and London: Macmillan, 1990).
- Barthes, Roland, *Image Music Text*, essays selected and transl. by Stephen Heath (London: Fontana, 1977).
- Bateson, F. W., ““Burbank””, in ‘*Prufrock*’, ‘*Gerontion*’, *Ash Wednesday and Other Shorter Poems: A Selection of Critical Essays*, ed. B. C. Southam (Basingstoke and London: Macmillan, 1978), pp.182-86.
- Bedient, Calvin, *He Do The Police in Different Voices: The Waste Land and Its Protagonist* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1986).
- Belsey, Catherine, “Love as *Trompe L’Oeil*: Taxonomies of Desire in “Venus and Adonis””, *Shakespeare Quarterly*, 46: 3 (1995), 257-76.
- Benson, A. C., *Edward Fitzgerald* (London: Macmillan, 1905).
- Bergonzi, Bernard, *T. S. Eliot* (London: Macmillan, 1972).
- Bergson, Henri, *Matter and Memory*, authorised transl. by Nancy Margaret Paul and W. Scott Palmer (London: Swan Sonnenschein, 1911).
- Bloom, Harold, *The Anxiety of Influence: A Theory of Poetry* (Oxford and London: Oxford University Press, 1973).
- Brooker, Jewel Spears, and Bentley, Joseph, *Reading The Waste Land: Modernism And the Limits of Interpretation* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1990).
- Brooks, Cleanth, “*The Waste Land: Critique of the Myth*”, in *A Collection of Critical Essays on The Waste Land*, ed. Jay Martin (New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, 1968), pp. 66-67.
- Brooks, Peter F., *Pearly Kings and Queens in Britain* (Chichester: Barry Rose, 1974).
- Bush, Ronald, “T. S. Eliot and Modernism at the Present Time”, pp.191-204 in
- ed., *T. S. Eliot: The Modernist in History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991).
- Calder, Angus, *T. S. Eliot* (Brighton: Harvester, 1987).
- Christ, Carol, “Gender, Voice, and Figuration in Eliot’s Early Poetry”, in *T. S. Eliot: The Modernist in History*, ed. Ronald Bush (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), pp.23-27.

- Cox, C. B., and Hinchliffe, Arnold P., eds, *T. S. Eliot: The Waste Land; A Case Book* (London: Macmillan, 1986).
- Craig, Cairns, *Yeats, Eliot, Pound and the Politics of Poetry: Richest to the Richest* (London: Croom Helm, 1982).
- Craig, Edward Gordon, "The Actor and the *Übermarionette*", in *The Mask* (1909), essay repr. in *Modernism: An Anthology of Sources and Documents*, ed. Vassiliki Kolocotroni, Jane Goldman and Olga Taxidou (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1998), pp.150-54.
- Crawford, Robert, *The Savage and the City in the Work of T. S. Eliot* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987).
- Cuddy, Lois, "Eliot's Classicism: A Study in Allusional Method and Design", in *T. S. Eliot Annual No. 1*, ed. Shyamal Bagchee (Basingstoke and London: Macmillan, 1990), pp.27-62.
- Day, Aidan, *Romanticism* (London: Routledge, 1996).
- Docherty, Thomas, *After Theory* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1996).
- Drew, Elizabeth, *T. S. Eliot: The Design of His Poetry* (London: Eyre and Spottiswoode, 1950).
- Eagleton, Terry, *Criticism and Ideology: A Study in Marxist Literary Theory* (London: New Left Books, 1976).
- "Capitalism, Modernism and Postmodernism", in *Modern Criticism and Theory: A Reader*, ed. David Lodge (London: Longman, 1988), pp.385-98.
- Eliade, Mircea, *Myths, Dreams and Mysteries: The Encounter Between Contemporary Faiths and Archaic Reality*, transl. by Philip Mairet (London and Glasgow: Collins, 1968).
- Ellmann, Maud, *The Poetics of Impersonality: T. S. Eliot and Ezra Pound* (Brighton: Harvester, 1987).
- Emig, Rainer, *Modernism in Poetry: Motivations, Structures and Limits* (London: Longman, 1995).
- Falck, Colin, *Myth, Truth and Literature: Towards a True Post-Modernism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989).
- Forbes, Peter, ed., *Scanning the Century: The Penguin Book of the Twentieth Century in Poetry* (London: Penguin, 1999).

- Fowler, D. C., "*The Waste Land*: Mr. Eliot's 'Fragments'", *College English*, 14 (January 1953), 234-35, repr. in *A Collection of Critical Essays on The Waste Land*, ed. Jay Martin (New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, 1968), pp.34-36.
- Frazer, J. G., *The Golden Bough: A Study in Magic and Religion*, abridged edn (1922) (Ware: Wordsworth, 1993).
- Frege, Gottlob, *The Frege Reader*, ed. Michael Beaney, transl. by Max Black (Oxford and Malden Massach: Blackwell, 1997).
- Freud, Sigmund, *The Standard Edition of The Complete Psychologic Works of Sigmund Freud* (24 vols), transl. under ed. James Strachey, Vol. XVII (London: Hogarth, 1950).
- *Totem and Taboo: Some Points of Agreement Between the Mental Lives of Savages and Neurotics*, authorised transl. by James Strachey (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1950).
- Fripp, Edgar I., *Shakespeare: Man and Artist* (2 vols), Vol I (London: Oxford University Press, 1938).
- Froula, Christine, "Eliot's Grail Quest, or, the Lover, the Police, and *The Waste Land*", *Yale Review*, 78: 2 (1989), 235-53, repr. in *T. S. Eliot* (Longman Critical Readers), ed. Harriet Davidson (Harlow: Longman, 1999), pp.166-87.
- Frye, Northrop, *Anatomy of Criticism: Four Essays* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1957).
- *On Culture and Literature: A Collection of Review Essays*, ed. Robert D. Denham (London: University of Chicago Press, 1978).
- Gardner, Helen, *The Art of T. S. Eliot* (London: Cresset Press, 1949).
- Gibson, William M., "Sonnets in T. S. Eliot's *The Waste Land*", *American Literature*, 32 (1961), 465-66, repr. in *A Collection of Critical Essays on The Waste Land*, ed. Jay Martin (New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, 1968), pp.32-33.
- Gilbert, Sandra, and Gubar, Susan, *No Man's Land: The Place of the Woman Writer In the Twentieth Century* (3 vols), Vol. I (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1988).
- Gitter, Elisabeth, "The Power of Women's Hair in the Victorian Imagination", *PMLA*, 99: 5 (1984), 936-53.
- Gordon, Lyndall, *Eliot's Early Years* (Oxford and London: Oxford University Press,

1977).

Graves, Robert, and Riding, Laura, *A Survey of Modernist Poetry* (London: Heinemann, 1927).

Gray, Piers, *T. S. Eliot's Intellectual and Poetic Development, 1909-1922* (Brighton: Harvester, 1982).

Griffiths, Eric, "Anticipations of Genius" (review of *Inventions of the March Hare*), *The Guardian*, 23rd August 1996, G2, pp.1-3.

Grosz, Elizabeth, *Jacques Lacan: A Feminist Introduction* (London: Routledge, 1990).

Habermas, Jurgen, "Modernity – An Incomplete Project" *New German Critique*, 22 (Winter 1981), 3-15, repr. in *Postmodernism: A Reader*, ed. Thomas Docherty (Hemel Hempstead: Harvester, 1993), pp.98-109.

Hallissy, Margaret, *Venomous Woman: Fear of the Female in Literature* (Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1987).

Hamilton, Ian, "The Waste Land", in *Eliot in Perspective: A Symposium*, ed. Graham Martin (London: Macmillan, 1970), pp.102-11.

Hands, Anthony, *Sources for the Poetry of T. S. Eliot* (Oxford: Hadrian Books, 1993).

Hartley, David, "Various Conjectures on the Perception, Motion, and Generation of Ideas" (1746), transl. from the Latin by Robert E. A. Palmer, *The Augustan Reprint Society*, 77-78 (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1959; New York: Kraus Reprint, 1967), 27-58.

Honderich, Ted, ed., *The Oxford Companion to Philosophy* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1995).

Hough, Graham, *Image and Experience: Studies in a Literary Revolution* (London: Duckworth, 1960).

Hughes, Ted, *A Dancer to God: Tributes to T. S. Eliot* (London: Faber and Faber, 1992).

Irigaray, Luce, *Speculum of the Other Woman*, transl. by G. C. Gill (New York: Cornell University Press, 1985).

- "This Sex Which is Not One", transl. by Claudia Reeder, in *New French Feminisms: An Anthology*, ed. Elaine Marks and Isabelle de Courtivrons (Brighton: Harvester, 1981), pp.99-106.

- Jain, Manju, *A Critical Reading of the Selected Poems of T. S. Eliot* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991).
- Jones, Genesis, *Approach to the Purpose: A Study of the Poetry of T. S. Eliot* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1964).
- Julius, Anthony, *T. S. Eliot, Anti-Semitism and Literary Form* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995).
- Jung, C. G., *The Collected Works of C. G. Jung* (24 vols), ed. Herbert Read, Michael Fordham and Gerhard Adler, transl. by R. F. C. Hull, Vol. XV (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1966).
- Kenner, Hugh, *T. S. Eliot: The Invisible Poet* (London: Methuen, 1965).
- Kermode, Frank, *The Sense of an Ending: Studies in the Theory of Fiction* (London And Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1967).
- Lacan, Jacques, *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psycho-Analysis*, ed. Jacques-Alain Miller, transl. by Alan Sheridan (London: Penguin, 1977).
- *Écrits: A Selection*, transl. by Alan Sheridan (London: Routledge, 1977).
- Leavis, F. R., *New Bearings in English Poetry*, 2nd edn (London: Penguin, 1972).
- Litz, A. Walton, "The Allusive Poet: Eliot and His Sources", in *T. S. Eliot: The Modernist in History*, ed. Ronald Bush (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), pp.137-51.
- Longenbach, James, " "Mature poets steal": Eliot's Allusive Practice", in *The Cambridge Companion to T. S. Eliot*, ed. A. David Moody (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), pp.176-88.
- Lucas, F. L., Review of *The Waste Land*, *New Statesman*, 3rd November 1923, p.116, repr. in *T. S. Eliot: The Waste Land; A Case Book*, ed. C. B. Cox and Arnold P. Hinchliffe (London: Macmillan, 1986), pp.5-6.
- MacKinnon, Lachlan, *Eliot, Auden, Lowell; The Baudelaireian Inheritance* (London: Macmillan, 1983).
- Martin, Graham, ed., *Eliot in Perspective: A Symposium* (London: Macmillan, 1970).
- Martin, Jay, ed., *A Collection of Critical Essays on The Waste Land* (New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, 1968)
- Matthiessen, F. O., *The Achievement of T. S. Eliot: An Essay on the Nature of*

- Poetry* (London: Oxford University Press: 1935).
- Maxwell, D. E. S., *The Poetry of T. S. Eliot* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1952).
- Mayer, John T., "The Waste Land and Eliot's Poetry Notebook", in *T. S. Eliot: The Modernist in History*, ed. Ronald Bush (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), pp.67-90.
- McArthur, Murray, "Deciphering Eliot: "Rhapsody on a Windy Night" and the Dialectic of the Cipher", *American Literature*, 66: 3 (1994), 509-24.
- McEldery, Bruce Jr., "Eliot's 'Shakespearean Rag'", *American Quarterly*, 9 (1957), 185-86, repr. in *A collection of Critical Essays on The Waste Land*, ed. Jay Martin (New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, 1968), pp.29-30.
- Melchiori, Giorgio, *The Tightrope Walkers: Studies of Mannerism in Modern English Literature* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1956).
- Mellor, Anne K., *Romanticism and Gender* (London and New York: Routledge, 1993).
- Miller, D. A. "Cage aux Folles: Sensation and Gender in Wilkie Collins's *The Woman in White*", in *The Nineteenth-Century British Novel*, ed. Jeremy Hawthorn (London: Edward Arnold, 1986), pp.95-124.
- Miller, James E. Jr., *T. S. Eliot's Personal Waste Land: Exorcism of the Demons* (Pennsylvania and London: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1977).
- Murphy, Paul, "The Dream Interpretation and the Dark Continent of Femininity: 'Circe's Palace' and 'On a Portrait'", *Essays in Poetics*, 19: 2 (1994), 25-33.
- "A Study in the Suicide of Selfhood: T. S. Eliot's 'The Death of Saint Narcissus', *Essays in Poetics*, 17: 2 (1992), 33-42.
- Musgrove, S., *T. S. Eliot and Walt Whitman* (Wellington: New Zealand University Press, 1952).
- Orwell, George, "Escape from the Consciousness of Futility", in *T. S. Eliot: 'Prufrock', 'Gerontion', Ash Wednesday and Other Shorter Poems: A Selection of Critical Essays*, ed. B. C. Southam (Basingstoke and London: Macmillan, 1978), pp.92-96.
- Palmer, Marja, *Men and Women in T. S. Eliot's Early Poetry* (Lund: Lund University Press, 1996).
- Pals, Daniel, *Seven Theories of Religion* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996).

- Patterson, Gertrude, *T. S. Eliot: Poems in the Making* (Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 1971).
- Pearson, Gabriel, "T. S. Eliot: An American Use of Symbolism", in *Eliot in Perspective: A Symposium*, ed. Graham Martin (London: Macmillan, 1970), pp.83-102.
- Pinion, F. B., *A T. S. Eliot Companion: Life and Works* (London: Macmillan,1984).
- Pinkney, Tony, *Women in the Poetry of T. S. Eliot: A Psychoanalytic Approach* (Basingstoke and London: Macmillan, 1984).
- Pound, Ezra, Review of *Prufrock and Other Observations*, *Poetry*, 10 (1917), repr. in *T. S. Eliot: 'Prufrock', 'Gerontion', Ash Wednesday and Other Shorter Poems: A Selection of Critical Essays*, ed. B. C. Southam (London: Macmillan, 1978).
- Powell, Charles, Review of *The Waste Land*, *Manchester Guardian* (October 1923), repr. in *T. S. Eliot: The Waste Land; A Case Book*, ed. C. B. Cox and Arnold P. Hinchliffe (London: Macmillan, 1986), pp.29-30.
- Raffel, Burton, *T. S. Eliot* (New York: Continuum, 1991).
- Ricks, Christopher, *T. S. Eliot and Prejudice* (London: Faber and Faber, 1988).
- Richards, I. A., *Principles of Literary Criticism* (excerpt), in *T. S. Eliot: The Waste Land; A Case Book*, ed. C. B. Cox and Arnold P. Hinchliffe (London: Macmillan, 1986), pp.51-55.
- Scofield, Martin, *T. S. Eliot: The Poems* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988).
- Shapiro, Karl, *The Death of Literary Judgement* (excerpt), in *T. S. Eliot: The Waste Land; A Case Book*, ed. C. B. Cox and Arnold P. Hinchliffe (London: Macmillan, 1986), pp.62-63.
- Shusterman, Richard, "Wilde and Eliot", in *T. S. Eliot Annual No.1*, ed. Shyamal Bagchee (Basingstoke and London: Macmillan, 1990), pp.117-44.
- Smidt, Kristian, *The Importance of Recognition: Six Chapters on T. S. Eliot* (Tromsø: [N. P.], 1973).
- Smith, Grover, *T. S. Eliot's Poetry and Plays: A Study in Sources and Meanings* (Chicago and London: University of Shicago Press, 1956).
- Southam, B. C., ed., '*Prufrock*', '*Gerontion*', *Ash Wednesday and Other Shorter*

- Poems: A Selection of Critical Essays*, ed. (Basingstoke and London: Macmillan, 1978).
- *A Student's Guide to the Selected Poems of T. S. Eliot*, 6th edn (London: Faber and Faber, 1994).
- Spark, Muriel, *Mary Shelley* (New York: Dutton, 1987).
- Spender, Stephen, *Eliot* (Glasgow: Fontana, 1975).
- Svarny, Erik, *'The Men of 1914': T. S. Eliot and Early Modernism* (Milton Keynes And Philadelphia: Open University Press, 1988).
- Tate, Allen, "T. S. Eliot", *Reactionary Essays* (New York: Charles Scribner, 1936) (excerpt), in *A Collection of Critical Essays on The Waste Land*, ed. Jay Martin (New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, 1968), pp.31-32.
- Thormählen, Marianne, *The Waste Land: A Fragmentary Wholeness* (Lund: C. W. K. Gleerup, 1978).
- Traversi, Derek, *T. S. Eliot: The Longer Poems* (London: Bodley Head, 1976).
- Twycross, Meg, *The Medieval Anadyomene: A Study in Chaucer's Mythography* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1972).
- Unger, Leonard, *Eliot's Compound Ghost: Influence and Confluence* (London: Pennsylvania University Press, 1981).
- *Moments and Patterns* (Minneapolis: University of Minneapolis Press, 1956).
- Ward, David, *T. S. Eliot: Between Two Worlds; A Reading of T. S. Eliot's Poetry and Plays* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1973).
- Weston, Jessie L., *From Ritual to Romance*, with foreword by Robert A. Segal (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1993).
- *The Quest of the Holy Grail* (London: G. Bell and Sons, 1913).
- Williams, Helen, *T. S. Eliot: The Waste Land*, 2nd edn (London: Edward Arnold, 1973).
- Wimsatt, W. K., and Beardsley, Monroe C., "The Intentional Fallacy", in Wimsatt's *The Verbal Icon: Studies in the Meaning of Poetry* (Lexington, Kentucky: [N. P.], 1954), repr. in *20th Century Literary Criticism: A Reader*, ed. David Lodge (London: Longman, 1972), pp.333-45.